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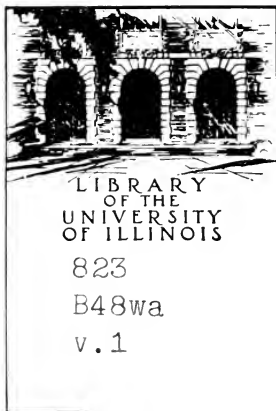
BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITE AND BLACK."

VOL. I.

HENRY S. KING & Co.,
65, CORNHILL; & 12, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

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Waiting for Tidings.

CHAPTER I.

GUARDIAN AND WARD.

THE late Churchill Cressingham, of Rawlstone Hall, in the county of Suffolk, had married the sister of Theodore Halton, of the city of London, and of Murchison Square, W., LL.D., F.R.S., F.R.G.S., and member of half-a-dozen learned societies in Paris and London besides ; and of John Halton, of Creswick Gardens, partner with Theodore in business, and by far the best business man of the two.

John Halton married his cousin, and had no children, which was a great satisfaction to him, as he liked quiet, and hated all moral responsibilities. Theodore had five or six olive branches, of whom, three survived to the age for systematic intellectual training. They bid fair to be well educated, for their

father was in correspondence with the most erudite men in Europe and America, and he early drew up a plan for their education, based upon principles at once logical and philosophical ; but, fortunately for them, their mother was quite unable to carry it out. Mrs. Halton's weak health made a residence in a warm climate necessary in the winter, so that the family went abroad every six months, and in the enforced idleness of travelling, the children found a healthy relaxation from the admirable discipline of their father's educational system. Edward, the eldest, also, emancipated himself by early displaying an aptitude for business, so that he was taken into the counting-house, but the girls continued to go abroad with their parents every winter.

Churchill Cressingham, having no near relative of his own, looked for a guardian for his little daughter Margaret among his wife's kith and kin ; and in consequence of these long absences of Theodore from home, he chose John Halton for that office, regardless of the fact that he did not like children ; nor did John grumble much at having to perform

the duties of guardian, as long as his sister was alive; but when she died, six years after her husband, and he saw he must undertake the responsibilities of an educator of youth in real earnest, he felt exceedingly aggrieved, and lifted up his voice and lamented.

“Why should Churchill have selected me for the child’s guardian? Theodore would have done much better and have found it no trouble. He has children of his own and knows all about them, and one more would have been of no consequence to him.”

“I do not think he or Alice know much how to bring up children,” said Mrs. Halton, by way of consoling her husband under this hard dispensation. “Their own girls are quite odd and peculiar. And I do not think your brother would have managed the little girl’s money as well as you will.”

“Well, no; there you are right, Anne. Theo’s business capacity is about equal to his skill on horseback: he makes but a poor figure in either way. That boy of his is already a much better man of business than

he is. No; Theo would have been a poor guardian for the property certainly, but I wish he had the charge of the child. I wish I had known this was to come so suddenly upon us."

Mrs. Cressingham's death had not come suddenly upon any one who ever bestowed a thought upon her. She had been slowly sinking ever since her husband's death, and everyone, except Mr. Halton, knew it. Churchhill Cressingham died from injuries sustained in the overturn of his carriage, and his wife who was with him on that occasion, although she survived the accident, never recovered from the hurt she then received. She soon left Rawlstone Hall, where she had been happy with her husband; a bailiff was left in charge of the farm there, and the house was let furnished to a gentleman of property who was rebuilding his own. She went to Enderby, in Lincolnshire, where she had a smaller farm and dwelling-house, and where she could be near to a dear friend of her schooldays who had married a doctor there. But as she liked the neighbourhood of the

sea, she went from Enderby to the little fishing village of Sandmouth, about ten miles off, and there took the Hermitage, the only good house in the vicinity, for herself and child and servants. Here she had remained, growing weaker and weaker, and holding but little communication with her brothers, for she had never liked John's wife, and Theodore was more often out of England than not. She wrote to him at Nice, shortly before her death, and begged him to take an interest in her poor little girl; and in writing to John, she suggested, that if at the time of her death, Theodore and Alice should be out of England, the child might remain at Enderby with her friend, Mrs. Grahame, until they should return,—an idea which now appeared to John Halton as very commendable.

“It is the only sensible thing my sister ever did,” he remarked. “I shall certainly let the girl remain with this Mrs. Grahame until Theodore returns. If poor Churchill had had any common sense, I might have been spared all this perplexity. It really evinced more want of discernment than I

would have given him credit for, to make me the girl's guardian. I have all the business to manage now Theodore is away (and it is even more trouble to me when he is at home, because he won't give his mind to it, and will interfere), and now I am to have all this girl's property to look after. It is killing me!" And Mr. Halton leaned back in his armchair, looking thoroughly ill-treated, and poured out a glass of wine to recruit exhausted nature.

"Take another glass, doctor," he said hospitably, for his medical attendant was sitting with him in his study, condoling with him on his annoying increase of responsibilities; but secretly wondering whether Mr. Halton's health would not be much better by having the excitement of a lively child running about his house.

"I shall go down to Enderby, no, to Sandmouth (that is further still), in time for the funeral,—I must, I suppose,—but not before," said Mr. Halton. "It would hardly do for me to undertake two journeys, so quickly succeeding each other; would it, doctor?"

"The poor little girl is not alone by herself, I suppose?" answered the doctor, evading the question.

"Oh, no; there are plenty of old family servants, and this Mrs. Grahame. She could not be in better hands. She would derive no comfort from my presence," said Mr. Halton, again leaning back in his chair. The doctor thought this last suggestion might be a true one, but he answered,—

"The sea air would do you good, perhaps," but his patient shook his head with an air of languid decision, and he said no more.

Mr. Halton did not go down until the day before the funeral. "His wife," he said, "did not wish him;" though it must be observed, that that amiable lady's interference in the matter was limited to saying,—

"Do you think you ought to go, dear? What do you think?"

"No; I don't think I ought," said Mr. Halton. "It is a day's journey there." And there the question ended; but in the matter of his guardianship, his wife had more to say. She was fifteen years younger than himself,

and was much occupied with dress and amusement.

"At any rate, my dear, you must not bring the little girl up here, because I should not know what to do with her. I am sure the nurse and other servants will stop and take care of her if you promise them an increase of wages; and I suppose we can find a good school where she can be educated."

"I suppose we must. Do you know of one?" answered her husband. "Dear, dear, to think that we should be obliged to look out for schools and governesses at our time of life!"

As his was precisely the time of life at which many men are bothered with the same thing, without having his ample income to support the expense thereon attendant, Mr. Halton was hardly to be pitied above the rest of his species. His lady cheered him up.

"Oh, Mrs. Grahame will help us about the child; and we can leave her with the nurse for a few months, till Theodore and Alice come home, and they will find a school for her. They have girls of their own, you know. I hope the child is pretty."

“And why?” asked her husband in surprise.

“Why, I should like her to be, because, when she leaves school and comes to us——”

“Oh, but she will never have to come and live with us,” said John Halton, with something so like a groan, that his wife looked frightened.

“Well, I do not know, John,” she made haste to say. “I suppose she must, when she comes out, till she is married.”

“And when is she to come out, as you call it?” he asked testily.

“Oh, not now, not yet, till she leaves school; when she is eighteen or nineteen.”

“Oh well, she is only fourteen now, thank goodness,” said the guardian much relieved, and crossing his right leg over his left, he opened the newspaper.

Mr. Halton went down for the funeral, saw his late sister's man of business, and made acquaintance with his niece. She certainly was not pretty. With features unformed, pale, and swollen with crying, and complexion tanned and freckled by exposure to the sea-air, she was rather the contrary. Mr. Halton had not the

experience of young people that would have enabled him to see the promise of beauty in the face which he saw now in its ugliest aspect; and what little interest had been excited in him for his sister's orphan, vanished before the sight of this very plain child. He did not like to raise the question of her going to school at present; he asked for Mrs. Grahame, and debated within himself what he should say to her. She lived at Enderby, ten miles off, and was, he learned, too ill to see any one. Her husband, Dr. Grahame, shook his head when Mr. Halton alluded to Mrs. Cressingham's hope that his wife would take an interest in the girl. "My wife will never be about again," he said sadly. "She hid her illness from poor Mrs. Cressingham; but she is now unable to leave her room, and never will again. 'You had better take the poor girl home with you.'"

Mr. Halton felt very much chagrined, and pondered what he had best do. He did not want to take his niece home with him. He found that Mrs. Cressingham's cottage (the Hermitage it was called), had been taken for a term of years, of which two were still to run,

and if he took his niece and the servants away, he should have to find a tenant for it. He was surprised that Mrs. Cressingham should have chosen to live in so lonely a spot,—a little fishing village, ten miles away from the nearest town ; but Dr. Grahame told him that she had originally come there for sea-bathing, and that as her illness increased, a kind of mental languor had gained on her, and she was content to remain where she was.

“She retained her faculties, so to speak, till within the last fortnight of her life, but she was incapable of any mental exertion,” he said. “She was governed by any one who was near her. In fact, the little girl ruled her and the house entirely. A strange child she is, and will want care in training, I can tell you.”

“I must find a good school, I suppose,” said Mr. Halton mournfully ; he was much vexed to find that the servants had told his niece she would accompany him back to London immediately. He was clear only on the one point, that that could not be ; he must for a time leave her where she was ; and during his solitary breakfast he debated how he should introduce the

subject to the girl herself. "Ruled the house and her mother? Then she will still expect to rule, and to settle whether she will go to school or not;" and Mr. Halton went out to walk on the shingle, and arrange his ideas while looking for his niece Margaret.

He found her sitting on the shore, trying to occupy herself with some needlework, and from time to time laying it down to look at the sea, and exchange a few words with a lad two or three years older than herself, plainly but neatly dressed, apparently as much of a companion as a servant. He seemed sad and dejected in sympathy with her, but he was trying to rouse her attention to, and interest in, various objects he pointed out along the shore or at sea.

"Do you see that brig, Miss May? She was out in the gale last Sunday, and has lost her boom and topsails. They sent a boat ashore for a new spar this morning."

"Where is she? I can't see her, Jesse," said Margaret looking up, her eyes full of tears.

Jesse pointed out the ship, and went on

describing the process of carpentering up the injured rigging.

Mr. Halton walked on to solve his perplexities, and settle what he should say to Margaret. When he came back, she was talking very earnestly to her companion.

"I never could bear to go to London with him. I wish he would leave me here. What will become of nurse and Green if I go? And you, Jesse, what will you do?"

"Oh, Miss May, if you go, I'll not stay. I have stopped ashore to please grandmother; but if you go, I'll have my own way, and go out with Master Lockwood. He has promised I shall."

"But Mrs. Freeman will be very unhappy if you do, Jesse," said Margaret in a tone of superior wisdom. "You must see that she only sent you to us that she might keep you ashore."

"Yes, Miss May; and as long as your mamma wanted me to draw her chair and lead the pony, I stayed, or if you wanted me I would; but I mean to go to sea. I won't be a gardener's boy or a ploughman; and if you go to London, I

will ask George Lockwood to speak to his uncle for me."

He was silent. May's tears, called forth afresh by his allusion to her mother, choked her voice, and for some minutes nothing was said. At last, Jesse, anxious to hear his young lady speak again, repeated,—

"They shan't make me a labourer or a ploughman."

"But why don't you help your brother in his shop, Jesse?"

"I hate the shop, Miss May, and Josiah knows I do."

"But your grandmother wishes to send you to school. Would not you go? You don't want to forget all I have taught you."

"It was very good of you to teach me, Miss May, but I don't care for schooling, unless it's you teach me. I want to go out with Lockwood; he's out a week at a time, and he lets John and George go out with him, and that's what I'll be doing if you are away, and don't want me."

"I hope I am not going away," replied May, crying. "I don't want to leave this

house where mamma died, and leave Green and Dr. Grahame, and your good, kind grandmother."

Mr. Halton had been listening to the conversation, and he now came up and said,—

"My dear Margaret, if——" but on second thoughts he saw no need to discuss his plans in the hearing of the sailor boy, and added, "Let us go back to the house, it is growing damp. Take up your workbasket."

"Jesse will. Here Jesse, get all the things together," said Margaret, addressing her late confidant in a tone of cool command; and throwing down her work for him to pick up with the basket and parasol, she followed her uncle into the house.

"You do not wish to leave this place, I heard you say," Mr. Halton began judiciously. "You would not like to go to school."

"To school? No; of course I should not," answered Margaret, as determinately as her sailor friend had expressed the same idea, but with far more vehemence. "I won't go to school; I don't want to; and I had rather stay here, uncle, than go to London

with you. Oh, please let me stay here, if you don't mind."

Her uncle did not in the least mind ; if he had been determined to take her to London, his decision would have been overthrown by that burst of vehemence. To endure such a child in his house for even a week would be an infliction not to be calmly contemplated, and he made haste to promise her that she might stay where she was, with two of the women servants and the gardener, who could look after the cows as well as the garden. He said he would dismiss the other servants before he went ; but, to his surprise, his little niece volunteered to undertake that task herself, and added, "And I should like to have the money for housekeeping, and their wages, and I will pay them if you like."

Mr. Halton stared at the readiness with which the girl undertook these responsibilities, and replied, "My dear, you could not do it."

"I have done it for the last year," said Margaret quietly ; "and I should like it now, now I have nothing to do ;" and her lips trembled. "I must learn to manage for my-

self now,"—but the girl's self-control here gave way, and she hurried out of the room sobbing.

"A strange child," thought Mr. Halton. "I did not imagine there was so much feeling in her; a curious mixture she is. I am glad I have settled to leave her here; she would never be happy at school."

So, satisfying himself that Mary Green, the housemaid, and James, the gardener, were respectable servants, and both fond of his niece, he told Margaret she should remain at the Hermitage for the present, and he would leave her to settle the dismissal of the other servants; and he went his way back to London, very thankful that, for a time at least, he need not trouble himself further about the girl.

Margaret Cressingham was thus left, at fourteen, mistress of her own household; and she was extremely grateful for this privilege. She never supposed there could be any objection to her being so left. Indulged and spoiled from infancy, she had, as Dr. Grahame had said, ruled her mother in most things,

and had her own way entirely. She had always been a quick and practical child, and had early begun to use her own individual judgment in every contingency, and, petted and praised invariably, she seldom experienced any unpleasant doubts of her own capacity for business. Green and the nurse admired her quickness, her mother yielded to her earnest arguments, and Jesse, her boy servant, literally worshipped her. No one ever pointed out to her her mistakes, while she had not only a quick perception of what was right, but a great facility for adopting the opinions of others, and believing them to be her own, and acting on them as such. Her mother and Green often directed her judgment without her recognising it; and when, by some chance, any other person had started an idea in her mind, her mother usually allowed her to follow her own desires unchallenged, even though they might not be the wisest possible. Jesse's advent in the household was the result of May's following her own judgment, or in other words, the suggestion of some one else than her mother and Green. Mrs. Cressing-

ham was, for the two years preceding her death, unable to walk more than a few yards ; and wishing to be in the open air as much as possible, she sent to Enderby for a garden chair with broad wheels, that could either be drawn on the road by a pony, or pushed along by hand on the sands. This done, May had to find a boy to lead the pony, or push the chair, as might be required. Green thought that at the village school, the desired boy might be found, and advised her young lady to go there ; but May, not liking the schoolmaster, who was of a surly temper, disregarded Green's suggestion, and passing the schoolhouse door, went on to the village shop, not to buy there the article required, but to learn information respecting it.

The village of Sandmouth possessed only one draper's shop ; and the owners of it, Josiah Freeman and his wife, held no inconsiderable place in the native aristocracy, and ranked next to Mr. Lockwood, fisherman and ship-owner, and the butcher. He was also a corn Chandler and coal merchant, and occupied two shops contiguous to one another ; the corn

was in one shop, which was also the coal office, and behind that was the ordinary living room of the family; whilst communicating with this room, but behind the drapery establishment, was the room—parlour and bedroom in one—of old Mrs. Freeman, Josiah's grandmother, who was respected still more than Josiah, in fact from whom he received much of his importance. The old lady kept her bed, her lower limbs being paralysed; but her eyesight was good, and her voice clear and sound. Her room was scrupulously neat, and bore evidences of comfort and savings, in the presence of tea-trays and pictures on the walls, workboxes, Bibles, and china on tables, and a carpet over most of the floor. There was also old mahogany furniture, well kept and polished, and the old woman's pillows were covered with fine linen. The room had two doors and two windows: one door led to the large parlour behind the corn shop, and the other to a smaller room; the window by the bed looked over a little garden, and beyond that over the churchyard, giving even a glimpse

of the sea; and the other afforded a peep into the dry-goods shop, which was a lively prospect, as customers were going in and out every ten minutes; or friends were holding a gossip with Mrs. Josiah Freeman, or Josiah himself. Among all these doors and windows, most invalids would have complained of draughts and chills, but Mrs. Freeman never had believed in such evils, and refused to do so now, and she sat cheerfully knitting in bed, with the door ajar and the curtains drawn back from both windows, so as to enjoy the sound of voices, the sight of her grandson and his wife cutting cheeses and calico, and the benefit of a cross light on her work.

On the morning that Margaret Cressingham went to ask her advice (May was always a welcome visitor to the old woman, who had lived in Rawlstone, and remembered Churchill Cressingham), Mrs. Freeman was knitting, with a quiet brow indeed, but there were traces of tears on her cheeks; her Bible lay near her, and she looked like one who has given thanks after great suffering.

Josiah came in, in his shirt sleeves and white apron, in one of the intervals of business; he led by the hand his youngest son, a sturdy urchin of three years old, who was sucking peppermint with all his might, and holding with his disengaged hand an unlucky kitten who had too imprudently listened to the voice of the charmer, and suffered itself to be grabbed.

"I hope you feel better, grannie, now your mind is at ease about Jesse," said Josiah as he came in.

"Oh, indeed I do, Josh. Thanks be to the Lord! What an escape the boy has had."

Josiah perched his little boy on a chair by the old lady's pillow, and asked, "Where is the lad? is he still asleep?"

Mrs. Freeman nodded assent, pointing with her knitting needle at the closed door on the other side of the room.

"It will be a pity if he does not let this be a warning to him," said Josiah; "but I don't think as he will, grannie, if you make such a fuss with him, now he is come back."

It was just what the dutiful son said to the father of the prodigal, and said in much the same spirit. The old woman sighed, and answered,—

“Jesse is very sorry,—very sorry, Josh. He says if you and I will excuse it, we shall never have reason to blame him again.”

“Till next time,” said Josiah, sceptically.

“Oh no, Josh; he will do better, indeed he will. Many a boy has run off to sea, and come home, and been a steady fellow after all; and Jesse did not only go but for three days, and could not have told that the wind would keep him out a week. You can't call that running off to sea, you know.”

“Oh I don't, and should think nothing of it if you had not made such a fuss the night of the gale,” replied her grandson. “Boys are boys. I ran off from school myself once, and that is worse, perhaps, than going out pleasuring in a fishing smack. I don't mind. Only——” He left the rest unsaid; Mrs. Freeman sighed, for the real trouble was, as Josiah had said, not the fact of Jesse's running off in his Sunday clothes, for

a trip with some fishermen who dealt at the shop, but in the evidences of a lawless and wild spirit, which his brother and grandmother had long recognised, and of which this escapade was but the last illustration. The Freemans were of the yeoman class; they had lived inland, and owned cottages and orchards, and looked on the sea as an uncertain and lawless condition. But now that they lived in a fishing village, it was pretty evident that Jesse would take to the sea unless some other excitement were provided. He hated the shop, perhaps from the consciousness that his brother did not intend ever taking him into the business, to the detriment of his own children. He refused to go to the village school, and equally declined his brother's offer of sending him to a higher class of school in Enderby.

He wanted fun, and he meant to have it; and it was purely for fun that he had persuaded the master of a fishing smack to take him aboard, and had run off one Sunday afternoon, dressed in his best, to join him. The trip had been lengthened by a gale of wind, and

Jesse had met cold and privation, and danger to boot, and now had come home to find his grandmother ill with anxiety on his behalf. His taste for adventure had been satiated, and he was very repentant; but even in his deepest repentance and promises of amendment, nobody felt any security that his good resolutions would last beyond the next temptation; so it was with a sigh Mrs. Freeman said, "Something may turn up, Josh. We will try and get him into the country, on a farm, and he will forget the sea."

"If he will go," said Josiah; "but he will be running off to sea from anywhere."

"There's some one come into the shop," said Mrs. Freeman, as she unloosed the little peppermint sucker's fingers from the kitten's neck.

"It's the little lady from the Hermitage; you'll like to see her I suppose," said Josiah. "I think I might buy the Hermitage, grannie, if I could save another hundred or so. Mrs. Cressingham would be a good tenant, she would not fidget about repairs; but here is Miss Margaret."

May was at that time between twelve and thirteen, and bright and lively with health, looking very different to the pale, sad girl her uncle met two years later. She put on a very dignified and gracious air as she came in. "How do you do, my dear? and how is your dear mamma?" said the old woman, receiving her with respectful cordiality. Josiah placed a chair for the young lady, with a great show of pleasure. May was a personage of immense importance to old Mrs. Freeman, who having originally come from the neighbourhood of Rawlstone, looked on Churchill Cressingham's heiress as her rightful princess. Josiah, with more practical wisdom, saw in her and her mother his best customers, and, if he could find money enough to buy the Hermitage, his probable tenants; and therefore he felt as much interest in them as did his doting old grandmother, but for a different reason. May was always spending money at the shop, or commissioning him to get articles from London; and when she came and sat an hour with the old woman, it generally ended in her

finding she wanted something or other, which she bought or ordered before she went. So Josiah was quite sincere in his respectful appreciation of her visit; and after placing a chair for her, he went out into the shop.

May unfolded her perplexity to Mrs. Freeman.

"Mamma is to have a pony-chair to go on the beach, and I want a boy to lead it; and I really came to you, Mrs. Freeman, because you know all the people about, and who is respectable, and who not. It is very light, you know, and when the pony is not harnessed to it, it can be pushed by hand on the sand quite easily. But we want a boy.

"Cannot James, your gardener, draw it down to the beach, my dear?"

"Yes; but we cannot keep him there all the morning to move it a few yards at a time, you know; and then we want things and books fetched from the house; we want a boy to stop near us all the time; not a common dirty boy, you know, but some one nice, more like your Jesse, you know."

May had not the least idea that Mrs.

Freeman would propose Jesse; the Freemans held their heads much too high to render it likely they would ever let one of the family be a domestic servant; but it came suddenly into the old lady's head, that if she could employ her refractory grandson in this service, it would be the means of keeping him out of mischief for a month or two; and she asked quickly, "Would Jesse do?"

"Jesse! oh, yes, if he could come—yes," said May, much surprised; "but I thought he was in the shop."

"He does not like the shop, miss, and he would be much contenteder minding your dear mamma's chaise than carrying out parcels for Josiah. I know he would like it, and it would be no end of advantage to him, Miss May, for he'd be out of mischief, and away from the sailors and them boys of Lockwood's, who teach him no good, and he might have time to learn a little writing from your gardener, you know."

"Oh, I will teach him myself, if you like," replied May, with easy patronage; "and he can come and see you every day, if you like."

"I don't know as that would be best, it would be bringing him all amongst the fishermen. But here he is," said Mrs. Freeman, as the inner door opened, and the young scapegrace, yawning portentously, came in. "Jesse, my boy, here's Miss Cressingham come down, and her mamma wants some one to push her chair about on the sands, and I have thought you would like to do it."

The returned prodigal understood by the tone in which this proposition was made, that compliance with it was to be the first proof of his penitence, so, however distasteful the project, he avoided making any objection. "When am I to go?" he asked, after gulping down a very different rejoinder.

"Oh, as soon as Susan can get your clothes in order," said Mrs. Freeman, and then hastily changing the subject, which she thought (foolish woman,) might be painful to the boy who had so wantonly exposed a new Sunday suit to the destructive influence of sea and storm, she asked, "But Miss May, dear, your mamma won't expect him to eat with the servants."

May was at a loss what to reply. Truth to say, she had intended to find a boy of a somewhat inferior grade to Jesse, and had made no provision in her own mind for the present contingency. Necessity, however, sharpened her wit, and after a moment's hesitation, she answered,—

“Mamma's nurse, you know, never eats with the servants. She has her dinner in the little parlour, and he might have his there too.”

“And he is to do nothing but wait on your mamma, my dear—not help anybody, either the cook or the parlour-maid.”

“Oh, no, I suppose not,” said May, quite confounded, for she was yet perfectly ignorant how the spirit of caste permeates the lowest classes of English life. “He is only to wait on mamma, and take letters and messages sometimes, you know. And,” she added, recovering her self-possession a little, “as to what he shall have, mamma will settle all that is right and proper, you know.”

“Oh, I know, Miss Cressingham, dear, I only want to know he should do nothing

menial," said the old woman, dwelling with marked disgust on the word that once used to denote a special claim to tenderness and indulgence towards the dependent. "I don't mind his helping James in the garden, but I should not like him to do anything menial."

"Nothing at all," replied May, growing more and more dignified, and as a servant now appeared to take her home, she said good-bye, and departed, exultant in the unlooked-for acquisition of Jesse, and in her own capacity for business. She walked home briskly, only stopping by the way to buy some shells, for which, as the vendor was not one of her worshippers, she paid seventy-five per cent. over and above their market value, and returned home to report success.

Mrs. Cressingham was not so much pleased when she heard of May's arrangement, and was still less so when Josiah Freeman came up to learn what wages would be offered to his brother. He at first declined to name any sum, leaving it, he said, to Mrs. Cressingham's sense of what was fitting, and then

when she insisted on knowing what he expected, asked an amount so extortionate that Mrs. Cressingham, annoyed and tired, refused to entertain the question of Jesse's coming at all, and to May's great distress, sent away Josiah, who returned to say at home that the ladies had changed their minds. Old Mrs. Freeman was at first not a little indignant with her patrons, and then trebly so with Josiah on learning the facts of the case.

"You've never been making a trouble about the money—it's a shame of you, Josh; as if it were a matter to trouble us, whether the boy got any wages for a month or two."

"I think it ought to be a matter to signify to him," said Josiah doggedly; "he costs enough, and many boys of his age are doing something towards their maintenance."

Mrs. Freeman replied very warmly, and a long altercation ensued; after which Jesse, who was lounging by the fire, got up, and going out, packed up his small belongings, and the next morning presented himself at the Her-

mitage. May, who had been much chagrined at the turn affairs had taken, came to the gate.

"I thought you were not coming, Jesse. Mamma told your brother, not."

"Grannie told me yesterday I was to come, and you told me so, miss, and Josiah has nothing to do with my going or not."

"But we told him——" Margaret was silent a moment.

"You want to come yourself?"—she asked abruptly,—“and Mrs. Freeman?”

"She wants me to come, miss. I don't care. I want to go to sea, but she promised I should come; and she is sore vexed Josh came up and interfered, he had no call to do it."

Margaret sent Jesse to the kitchen to have some breakfast, and went to her mother to plead his cause, or, rather, her own and that of her crony Mrs. Freeman. Her arguments were successful; she was sent to negotiate with the old lady, and Jesse entered the service to which his grandmother had condemned him, and which he, accepting as penance for his late misconduct, was resolved to endure

in defiance of Josiah. His duty consisted in leading the pony for a couple of hours on the shore, or waiting, lying on the sand at a respectful distance while Mrs. Cressingham read or worked, ready to fetch a book or parasol from the house, or move the chair back from the advancing tide. During this time he was carving any stray bit of wood that came to hand with his pocket-knife, or throwing stones into the water, for reading was no delight to him.

"Is it possible you do not care for a book?" said May. "Can't you read?"

"Oh, yes; I can read, but I don't care to," was the unpromising answer. "Thank you, miss, for the book, all the same, but I don't want it."

Margaret went back to her mother. "Is it not strange, mamma, that such a nice clever looking boy should hate books?"

"My dear, he cannot perhaps read well enough to enjoy it; find him an easy story book, and advise him to read it."

May selected a book that very afternoon, and asked Jesse if he could read that.

"Oh yes, I can read that," the boy replied scornfully. "I've been to school;" and he read half a page, evincing by constant stumbling, and perfect indifference to stops, that schooling was not, as our French neighbours say, his *forte*. May was disgusted at so much ignorance, and speedily resolved to cure it. She did not ask her intended scholar whether she should instruct him or not, but with prompt decision swooped down upon him at once.

"You must read to me out of this book, Jesse. Spread that shawl on the sand for me; and now read."

And thus forced into the temple of learning, Jesse read. He was doleful, and took no interest in his task until May found a story of shipwreck, at which his understanding brightened up, and when narratives of foreign adventure were handed to him, he applied himself diligently to master their contents.

May taught him also to add up sums according to the rules of the arithmetic books; as to the logical why and because of each process, that was unknown to herself; but as

far as her knowledge went, she did her best to improve her pupil's understanding ; while he, on his side, brought her birds' nests and dormice from the fields, bargained with the fishermen for foreign shells for her, led her pony through the most tangled and unknown paths of Sandmouth woods, and was untiring in his devotion to her.

Mrs. Cressingham, as time went on, kept more to her sofa, and more seldom needed Jesse's attendance with the garden-chaise ; but she was glad to send May out for distant rambles, under such safe guardianship, and was pleased to see her enjoying her young fresh life, while she knew her own was fast ebbing away. Margaret, poor ignorant child, fondly believed her mother would get well ; and made plans for the future, dreaming not what the future was bringing forward. Mrs. Cressingham complained very little ; she suffered less than she had done, and when the autumn came round again, and the sea-shore was no longer warm, May thought it very natural that her mother should keep to her sofa, and send her long walks in the woods

along with Jesse. Mrs. Cressingham had less consciousness of her own danger than she had had some months before; a kind of lethargy was stealing upon her,—she knew she was dying, but she did not realise how fast death was coming; and she would not sadden her daughter by the idea of her death, when that sorrow might yet be a long way off. It was from Jesse, that May first learned her mother was dying; she had been persuading herself that the greater indifference Mrs. Cressingham showed about her long walks, and absences from her, was the result of stronger health, and so had tried to like it. Jesse knew, as the servants all did, that a dull apathy was stealing over her; an indifference to all things; a torpor which, to them, seemed the sure precursor of death. They took advantage of this indifference to her daughter's presence, to keep May as much as possible away from her, hoping thus to make the poor girl feel the coming separation less. Jesse heard his grandmother say when he went to visit her,—

“It's a pity they keep it from her; it will only make it worse for her afterwards,

if she thinks she has been neglecting of her." And he was thinking of these words when May said,—

"Do you think my mamma is better, Jesse? She never comes out now, but she seems in less pain than she was."

"I'm afraid she'll never get better, Miss May; I'm afraid not."

The tone said what the words did not. May started as if struck by an actual blow from an invisible hand, looked in his face a moment, and then turned away. Jesse stood and watched her: it was not for him to offer consolation, he knew the distance between them. But at last he went up to her.

"Come, Miss May, it is late, and if you stop later your mamma will be anxious; come home."

May went home; but from that day she hardly quitted her mother's side. Sometimes the servants wiled her out on various pretexts; once Jesse begged her to come down to see a boat-house he had built, and to say whether an old boat lying there should be repaired

and painted. They all feared that the young girl's health would fail in her close attendance in the sick room; but the end was nearer than they supposed. Life did not last long after the mother's interest in her child's outgoings and incomings had ceased, and she died one morning, about three weeks from the time when May first learned her danger.

CHAPTER II.

ONLY A SERVANT.

WHEN May asked her uncle to let her arrange her own housekeeping difficulties, she followed her instinct of self-dependence, rather than any well-reasoned principles of action. If, in her sorrow, she had been able to think of her own future, she would have seen, that to keep Jesse at the Hermitage was almost a necessity for her. Without him she could not continue her long walks or rides, or have the boat, which had been a great delight to her. But she did not think about this. She only knew she felt less unhappy when he was talking to her, and directing her attention to the sea and the garden, and that she felt less lonely when he was by. She knew that Green was fond of her, but she intuitively felt that Jesse was fonder still; and she had feared from the moment her uncle came, that he might tell him to

go away. When he spoke of reducing the number of servants, she grew desperate, and, following a sudden suggestion of childish cunning, or woman's wit, asked to be left to dismiss the supernumerary servants herself. The permission was given, and she felt inexpressibly relieved. As soon as her uncle went home, she unfolded her projects to Green.

"Now Greenie, dear, if Jane and nurse go, cook had better go too; you can do all the cooking you and I shall want, can't you? I'll help you to make our beds. I can do my own room, and Jesse will stop and clean the knives for you, and fetch water and coal, and help you in everything, when James can't; and then, if Jesse stops, I can still have my pony and the boat, and I should be ill without."

And Green, won over by coaxing and kissing, and having a great dislike of the cook, as an intermeddler between her and the gardener when he came into the kitchen, assented to the proposal.

"It's astonishing what sense that poor child has," she said to James. "I was

thinking myself, what would she do, shut up here in the garden, and no one to go out with. I couldn't go long walks with her, nor could you go for hours leading that pony. She'd have been ill with moping, and now it will be a blessing to see her going out for those long walks, and coming home rosy, as she used to; I'm surprised she should have thought of it, but it's the best thing to keep Jesse."

And so James thought, and so Jesse thought also; he had delighted old Mrs. Freeman by telling her he was having lessons from Miss Cressingham, and he did not deem it necessary to mention that he now condescended to clean shoes and knives, lest the old lady's pride should take umbrage at this indignity. He was content to do any kind of work, so long as he could remain at the Hermitage, and was almost furious with his brother, who counselled him to ask for higher wages.

"Just as if I was a servant," he exclaimed angrily. "I stop there because I love her; if her uncle were to offer me a hundred

guineas, it would make no difference to me."

"Some day you'll think different," said Mr. Freeman "when, you find you are grown up, and got no start in life. I'd put you to school if you would go; for schooling will help you more than anything to get on and get money."

"If I want money, I'll earn it in the way I choose," said Jesse. "Master Lockwood will take me with him, I am certain, when I ask him; but I'll stop with Miss May as long as I can be any good to her."

That he was of good to her nobody doubted, as they saw his devoted attendance on her in her long walks, and observed the healthy colour gradually come back to her cheeks, or saw her intense enjoyment of a row on the fresh, health-breathing sea. The chair-chaise had been sent back to Enderby, but the pony still remained, and May rambled over hill and dale, sometimes for the whole day; Green feeling perfectly easy that she could come to no hurt, as long as Jesse was with her and promised to take good care of her.

Early in the morning they set off for the ride, with dinner in a basket, borne on May's knee, and returning during the afternoon, they put the pony into the paddock, went down to the boat and sat in it, moored at the landing-place, if Jesse were tired with his long walk, and did not care to row. When the summer came and the sun was hot and the lanes dusty, they left the walks and rides till evening, and sat all day in the boat.

In the evening, May would have her tea in the drawing-room in dignity and propriety, as became the mistress of the house; but as soon as she had finished it she summoned Jesse to the parlour, in the new character of pupil, for she had again taken his education in hand, and with an energy that would have produced some effects if the books at the Hermitage had been selected for mental improvement, or any older head had been there to suggest some method of teaching.

But the literature at the Hermitage consisted either of novels, or of serious and

reflective works, of which Mrs. Cressingham was fond, and May's lesson-books. These last might have been useful to Jesse, but May rejected them, and thinking he might learn reading as well from Scott as from Mrs. Markham, and finding it pleasanter to make him understand *Ivanhoe* than Mangnall, locked up the scholastic worthies along with the sermons, and resolved to combine amusement with instruction ; so that Jesse's studies were more agreeable than profitable. Moreover, he read so slowly that when the narrative became thrilling, she always took the book from him and read aloud, so that his improvement in reading was not so rapid as could have been wished.

With the autumn, appeared another companion for May, and he was one more able to sympathise with her love of historical romance. This was Lewis Grahame, the son of the doctor who had attended Mrs. Cressingham, and whose wife had been her constant friend. Mrs. Grahame was now dead, and Margaret rarely saw the doctor ; but he came over in October, and brought Lewis, who had

been at school at York, and had been ill, and who was to stay at Sandmouth for the benefit of the sea air. A lodging was found for him at the postmaster's, but he spent nearly all his day at the Hermitage. He was then seventeen, and suited May, as a companion, exactly. He had read all Scott's novels and all G. P. R. James's, and could retail the chief incidents of each for her edification. He was captain of his school, and had endless stories of school frolics and iniquities to glory in. He was a first-rate pedestrian, and led her pony further than she had ever been; while Jesse walked at some distance behind, "marvellous discontented," for he was now no longer the friend, but only the groom. Lewis had no objection to making a companion of him when they two were alone together, but he would not admit his equality when May was present. It was only in the boat that Jesse rose to any importance whatever. There he was master, and they were obliged to consider him and consult him; but they were very seldom in the boat, and he felt neglected. He betook himself to the

town, to find out his old friends, George and John Lockwood, two stout lads, older than himself, and went off for half the day in a cockle-shell of a boat with them. When he came to pay a visit to his old grandmother, his talk was of ships and tideways, and he tried to ignore his relations with the Hermitage.

"When are you going to come back to us, Jesse?" Josiah asked one evening, as they were sitting by the fire in old Mrs. Freeman's room.

"When Miss Cressingham goes to London, I can think of it," said Jesse; and he broke off into a whistle.

"You'd best be thinking of finding something else to do," said Josiah. "You could have man's wages now. Dr. Grahame, at Enderby, wants a gardener's boy."

"I am not going to take wages of Dr. Grahame," said Jesse shortly. "Miss May never scolds or orders me about; I don't mind serving her, but I won't have Lewis Grahame making a servant of me."

"No, nor I don't want you to," responded

his grandmother. "If you was to be gardener's boy up at Churchill Park,—near my old home,—well, I should not mind. Your mother's father was gamekeeper up there years back, and you might come to be one of the head gardeners yourself."

"I only meant," observed Josiah quietly, "that if Jesse likes to be a servant-lad now he is seventeen, he had better look out for higher wages, that's all; if he wishes to be something more than that, it's time he got some schooling, or did something."

"Well, Josh, if you have got a venture to send to the West Indies, suppose you send me with it," said Jesse, with a mischievous laugh. "But I won't be gardener's boy to Dr. Grahame; I'd rather work for one of the farmers."

"Why, don't you like the doctor? he is a kind man," said old Mrs. Freeman. "Why, his father were a farmer's son, and he got rich, and sent his son to school, and now he is a gentleman; but many is the pot of ale his father has had with your grandfather, Josiah, at the King's Head at Yarmouth; for

your grandfather was as good as he was, any day; and if he had grown rich, your father might have had an education too, and you might have been a doctor, or a gentleman, too, like young Master Lewis."

"Young Lewis isn't no gentleman, as I see," said Jesse, more warmly than grammatically.

"Heyday! what's in the lad?" exclaimed Mrs. Josiah, who came in carrying a tray with some eatables upon it. "What now? Young Master Lewis not a gentleman? Here, grannie, here's supper; I hope it is nice. Josiah, our supper is ready."

"I'm a-coming," replied her husband. "Jesse, where do you see Master Lewis?"

"Oh, he comes and walks out with Miss Cressingham sometimes," replied Jesse; "and gives himself airs like a real gentleman; he is a-sitting reading with her now, I'll be bound, he always does of a Sunday evening."

"And what kind of fellow is he?" inquired Josiah, as he arranged the supper-tray before the old woman.

"Oh, a land-lubber," said Jesse, sharpening a knife on a fork diligently; "talks

Greek and Latin, but he don't know one end of a boat from the other."

"Well, that does not make a man not a gentleman, if he has had schooling," said Mrs. Josiah.

"Any one can tell a real gentleman, born and bred; and he is not one," said Jesse, vindictively.

"Well, I have been in the world longer than you," answered Josiah, "and I can't always tell a gentleman born, though I think I can tell when a man has had money to spend for twenty years or so. That gives him a look which the 'real gentleman born,' as grannie calls him, generally has; and there's a good deal in features—a handsome face always looks gentleman-like, at least folks think so. You, boy, or my boys, if you could make a goodish bit of money, could pass for gentlemen, I daresay."

"You don't think that Gerald and Henry would ever look like gentlemen," cried Jesse, sneeringly. "That they won't, Josh; not with all the schooling in the world, so you need not think it."

"Oh well, if they can't, they can't," said Josiah, good-humouredly, and walking off to his supper in the next room. Old Mrs. Freeman laid her hand on Jesse's shoulder, and said,—

"O my lad, if you would go to school and learn a bit, it would give me such a pleasure. I have a bit of money for you, and you could go to the Grammar School at Enderby, where gentlemen's sons are."

"And be kicked out and blackguarded because my brother keeps a shop here," answered Jesse, forcing a laugh to hide his irritation. "No, grannie; I will stay with Miss Cressingham, and when she goes I must go and see the world; I must go; I want to see America."

"He is put out to-night," old Mrs. Freeman said to herself. "It's that young Master Lewis been speaking rudely to him, perhaps."

It was Master Lewis who alone caused Jesse's ill-humour. When he returned to Enderby, Jesse recovered his former importance and his good temper at the same time. He coaxed his young mistress into

the boat every day, and wearied himself out in rowing her up and down the shore, or in leading the pony as far, or farther than Lewis had done. In the evenings, the lessons were resumed, and a fresh historical novel produced, which Jesse began, and May continued reading to him, to encourage him to take more pains. He wrote in a copy-book, and as she liked reading aloud, she continued this exercise while he wrote, and in time the two lessons became merged in one: he copying diligently at the table, and she sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, reading aloud whatever she judged likely to interest or improve her scholar. The selection of subjects was more adapted to the teacher's intellect than to the pupil's; but when he did not understand, he asked no questions, but copied diligently.

"I wonder how it is," said May innocently, "that you always write so much better when I read poetry, than when I talk to you; this writing is very good, Jesse,—very good; but you must not copy my handwriting any more, you should have a gentlemanly hand.

Here, take this letter that my uncle sent me, and copy his writing over and over again. And now listen, I am going to begin the story. It is about a king of France."

"Is it about a ship?" asked Jesse, without looking up from his writing.

"No; you care for nothing but ships; you must hear something else. There was a king of France who was very tyrannical, and his nobles all hated him." May explained at full length, but her pupil was not heeding. He threw all his soul into his writing as soon as he found there was no ship coming, and she finished the book to herself.

Lewis came over from Enderby again during the Christmas holidays, and presented himself every day at the Hermitage, where he was always welcome. At the end of January he was still in his old quarters at the post-office, and he walked with May every day, and came every evening for a chat; while Jesse, frowning, had to take his writing-book into the kitchen. He felt this degradation keenly; Green offered to hear him read, but he rejected her kindness, and wrote in

silence, copying over and over again some letters of Mr. Halton's, which his mistress gave him for examples. Every day May accompanied Lewis in long rambles, while Jesse had to follow at a distance, ready to hold the pony if she got tired of riding it, or carry the little lunch basket. He felt he was nothing to her; his sulkiness increased, and he went every evening to cultivate his acquaintances in the town. Josiah found him among the fishermen, and brought him home with him. Mrs. Freeman saw something was rankling in the poor lad's mind, and begged him to come and pass the next day with them if he could be spared at the cottage.

"Oh you can be spared, I am sure," said Josiah, as they sat down to supper. "What is there for you to do? Miss Cressingham is rambling about all day over the country with young Grahame, more's the pity."

"And I suppose she may do it if she likes," said Jesse hotly. "What affair is that of yours, Josh?"

"None of mine, more than yours," replied Josiah coolly. "Here, hold your mug if you

want some more beer. But if I was Mr. Halton, I would send her to school, to learn things a young lady should know, and what she should do."

"She is a better judge of what she should do, than you," said Jesse; and feeling his temper was growing too savage, he stuffed his mouth full of cheese, and silenced himself perforce.

But the next day, when May and Lewis told him that he might lead the pony home, while they went on a mile farther, he felt that Josiah's observations were not at all too harsh, and that his young lady's conduct was in the highest degree unbecoming. He doubted whether he should not suggest this to Green, and advise her to counsel her mistress; but on second thoughts, he concluded that he himself might be the better person to speak. He was not, he considered, like Green, a servant, he was more of a companion; and it was in the boat, where he felt himself most of a companion and protector, that Jesse's spirit waxed bold, and he spoke. May had told him to row homeward, remarking that

she was going out in the afternoon with Lewis. Jesse rested on his oars, and said,—

“Miss May, I don’t think your uncle, if he was here, would like you to be going out so much with Master Lewis; you are a lady, and he is not the kind of gentleman who can take care of you.”

“Jesse!” cried May indignantly, resenting his interference. “Mind your own business! How dare you speak of what is proper for me! You don’t know; you are only a servant, and should not dare to judge of what I do. Row the boat home,” she added imperiously. “Row home at once.”

Poor Jesse was thunderstruck at this reply from his young mistress, whom he had certainly not wished to offend. But his pride was quite as susceptible as hers. With a swelling heart he answered,—“I did not mean to be rude, Miss May; but indeed it is true, and other people have said——”

“You forget yourself, and who I am,” interrupted May, kindling in wrath. “I do not want to hear what you or any other servant may——”

"Servant! Miss May!" said the lad indignantly. "I am not your servant."

Not? May was for a moment, too much astonished to speak; and then her sense of injured dignity coming to her aid, she answered,—

"If you are not my servant, *what* are you? I always thought you were; but I do not want to know what you think of me at all. I have my friends, and I talk to them about myself. Yes, I am a lady, and you need not be my servant any longer if you don't like." And then she caught up a book that lay near her hand, and pretended to read it.

Crimson with shame and anger, Jesse seized his oars and pulled violently, till he reached the little platform which he had built for a landing-place. Lewis was there, and May stepped out, and taking his arm, walked to the house with him; while Jesse, setting his teeth in rage, threw his fury into his rowing, and hurried his boat away towards the town.

May and Lewis walked towards the house.

"Has anything vexed you?" asked Lewis.

"No, nothing," said May angrily; "don't talk of it."

"I won't then," said Lewis obediently. "You looked so very like your cousin, Edward Halton."

"Do I? Why, how does he look?" asked May, very ready to change the current of her thoughts.

"Edward? How? Why very like you, when you are vexed," said Lewis laughing. "You are very much alike. I have never told you that I met your cousins when I was in London. They came to visit the people I was with, Mr. and Mrs. Evanshaw; and I was so surprised to see them."

"Uncle John has no children, I know; they must have been my uncle Theodore's then," said May.

"Oh yes, they were. Have you ever seen your uncle Theodore?"

"No, I have not. Oh, tell me about them," said May eagerly; for she saw Lewis's eyes brimful of fun. "Tell me really what they are all like."

“Well, he is the rummiest, jolliest old chap I ever saw. He is always poking about old skulls and bones, and flint-heads for arrows, and such rubbish; and talking of men who lived before the flood, or before Adam,—I forget which he said,—and he puts one pair of spectacles on the top of his head, and another pair over his eyes, so that he looks just like a great owl with horns on its head, or little ears, you know.”

“You don’t say that is my uncle! And what is Edward like?”

“Oh, he is a nice fellow, but a bit of a prig. I like him though. Then your aunt is well enough; she is kind-looking and handsome.”

“Uncle John’s wife? Aunt Anne?”

“Oh no; she is a horrid stuck-up thing, all silk dress, and flounces, and gold bracelets and stuff. I mean Dr. Halton’s wife, Edward’s mother; your aunt Alice. She is jolly, but she looks very ill. Then there are two girls, younger than you; at least I think Gertrude is, and little Florrie is quite a child. I told Edward

I knew you. He thought you lived at Enderby."

"And Enderby Grange is my house, don't you know?" said May a little grandly.

"Shall you live there when the people who live there now go away, then?"

"Oh no. I should like to go back to Rawlstone, it was so pretty. I can remember it so well. There were pine-trees there; and the house was so old and grey, and perched on the cliffs, like a fortress guarding all the shore."

"It must have been rather dismal in the winter, during a storm; a kind of *garde douloureuse*," said Lewis.

"Oh no, not all, I should think," said May eagerly. "The pine-trees would keep all the wind away. I remember the pine-trees. Papa used to carry me out among them, and let me pick cones off the lower boughs; and there were little fir-trees being planted all about, as high as me, and all green."

"Rawlstone is in Suffolk, is it not? a little south of Yarmouth?" said Lewis. "It

must be a nice place ; but would not you like to see Enderby Grange ? Shall we go and see it to-morrow ? It is my last day here but one, you know ; do come."

May assented, and asked Green to tell Jesse to go to the Blue Lion at Sandmouth, and order the one fly kept there to come the next morning to take them to Enderby. She was too angry with Jesse to see him herself, and she was hardly surprised to find the next morning that he had not come home that night, and that no fly was ordered. Lewis, however, took care to order it that evening, when he went home to his lodgings, and the next day they drove to Enderby. It was a cold morning, and the wind whistled shrill over the moor, and they were very chill when they reached the Grange. However, they met a hearty welcome from the tenant, a young farmer, who took them into the parlour, and ordered luncheon for them, and after they were well warmed by the roaring fire, he took them out, and showed them everything that could possibly interest them on the place. Rick-yards, cattle-sheds, waggon-

sheds, and barns, all were visited; and May began to feel that the owner of a farm must be a personage of great importance. All the labourers seemed to know she was the mistress of the place, and touched their hats as they passed by her; and the young farmer himself appeared to think no trouble too great to express his sense of her dignity. He brought them back to the house, and called his sister, a quiet, lady-like girl, to show Miss Cressingham all the curious old building; and while she was viewing this, he had a side-saddle put on a handsome pony, and volunteered to take her though all the fields to the farther end of the farm. He was, however, called away on important business, and May had only Lewis for her escort, and enjoyed her progress much better in consequence; for she found it very difficult to keep up the extreme dignity which she felt became the owner of all these fields and rick-yards. It was pleasanter to be alone with Lewis, and talk nonsense if she pleased. They went round the farm and returned, and had a country

tea pressed on them before they were allowed to start for the long drive, which, however, appeared much shorter to them than when they came in the morning. They drove to the Hermitage, and then Lewis returned to Sandmouth, first saying good-bye, for it was the last day of his stay, and he could not hope to come back until Easter.

CHAPTER III.

VERY UNHAPPY.

MAY had come home imbued with a tremendous sense of her dignity as an owner of land, and the future mistress of Rawlstone, which being, as she knew, far more important than Enderby Grange, appeared to her imagination as a magnificent wilderness of fields and woods, filled with rick-yards and hay-stacks. She felt much excited at the idea of having to overlook so much property when she grew up, and with the energy of fifteen, resolved to make haste and prepare herself for this future responsibility. The following morning she made a tour, *en châtelaine*, round the garden and poultry-yard of the Hermitage; asked the gardener how the pony was, and almost in the same breath inquired if Jesse was come back.

"No," James said; and he did not think he would, as he had sent a friend to take his things away.

"Gone? Oh, he can't be gone!" cried May, in real distress, as she remembered what she had said to him.

James made no reply, and went on hoeing, and she had time to remember her new dignity, and added,—

"He would hardly go without speaking to me. I shall see about it;" and she went to put on her hat, and walked down to the town. She felt very uncomfortable; her conscience told her she had treated Jesse ill, and though she was still very angry with him, she hoped to find he was keeping away to help Mr. Freeman in the shop, not because he resented her treatment of him; and she revolved in her mind in what way she should address him, so as to show she was conscious of having had cause to complain, and yet was willing to forget the past. Her heart went rather fast as she entered the shop. Josiah came forward quickly to the counter.

"Good morning, Mr. Freeman. I want to know where Jesse is," she demanded, with the air of a sheriff's officer asking the same question.

Mr. Freeman did not suffer a muscle of his face to move, while he answered,—

“I believe he is in Yarmouth, miss; but he does not tell me anything of what he is doing.”

“Gone to Yarmouth!” May looked very blank. “And when is he coming back?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, Miss Cressingham. He is full of whims and fancies; his grandmother is fretting about him a good deal. Would you like to see her?”

“Yes. No; I think it would be no use. Well, I should like to see her to know how she is,” said May; and she went in. Mrs. Freeman looked very miserable, but she made a feint of smiling as the young lady came in, and said she was well. May asked her of Jesse, adding,—

“I am surprised he should go without saying anything to me.”

“Did not you send him away then, my dear?” the old lady asked, looking at her knitting, and not at her visitor.

“No, indeed,” replied May; “I should not have thought of doing so. I had to speak

—to blame him a little, he was rather impertinent; but I did not imagine he would have taken it in that way.”

“Oh, it is just like his way, miss,” observed Josiah. “If one speaks to him he sulks for a month. I am very sorry you should have had any annoyance, Miss Cressingham. Will you come back into the shop! I should like to show you some new cheese.”

Old Mrs. Freeman sniffed pretty loudly as they went out, and her grandson thought it better to apologise.

“She is rather put out, miss; she wanted Jesse to remain with you, and she forgets how ill-tempered he is at times. I hope you will take no offence.”

“Oh, none at all, Mr. Freeman,” said May, very glad to see he was on her side; and she went home much happier than she had set out. But a week later she could not forbear questioning Green if she had heard anything of the runaway.

“Yes, miss. James was last night at Mr. Freeman’s, and they had heard from Jesse, and he was going to the West Indies.”

To the West Indies! May stood aghast at first, and then felt compunction and real sorrow for her own conduct. He was gone away for months, perhaps years,—he who had been a kind and faithful friend to her,—and gone because she had so unkindly taunted him with his inferior position. In her grief and repentance, May forgot all her pride, and went to see old Mrs. Freeman, and try and console her for Jesse's loss.

“Oh, Miss May, I shall never see him again,—never again!” was her moan; and neither her grandson nor May could comfort her by their assurances that the West Indies are not very far off, and that she would live a long time yet.

“It is no use your coming to try and reason with her, miss; though it's very good of you,” Josiah said one day, when May came. “She will fret over the boy, though it is the very best thing he could do. No offence to you, miss, but I was sorry to see him wasting his time helping your cook, and leading your pony. It was time

he should be doing something to make his own fortune."

"I am glad you think that," said May, feeling much comforted by the hope that Jesse would be better off in the end for her temporary harshness. Old Mrs. Freeman was indignant with Josiah for the care he took to soothe the young lady's feelings.

"Doing something to better himself, did you say, Josh? it's a lie, then. How is going out as a common sailor-boy to better his fortunes? If you had sent him with a venture to Australia, it might have started him in business; but being a sailor won't help him on; and you know it won't."

"I had not the money to start him in business, grannie; I wish I had," said Josiah, laughing. "I'd have sent him to school if he would have gone, and that would have been the kindest thing to have done by him."

"Yes; but why do you tell Miss May she has done kindly by him, in saying the words as drove him off, when it's to his ruin maybe, and you telling her it is for his good."

“Well, why should I make Miss Cressingham unhappy about him, and drive her away from my shop, when it can do no good?”

“There you are, Josiah; money, money, is the word with you; you prefer your shop to your own flesh and blood.”

“Indeed, it is for my own flesh and blood I value my shop; I’ve five children, and if I want to get them on in the world I must look to money, I think, and not quarrel with my best customers.”

And Mr. Freeman repeated this sentiment triumphantly more than once, when he received an order for coals and corn, which had hitherto been supplied to the Hermitage from Enderby; and also when Miss Cressingham commissioned him to get from London, besides silk and crape, hearthrugs and carpet, and nearly a hundred yards of calico and flannel. For, after reading all the novels in the house, May had discovered that making clothes for the poor, would be the right occupation for her. She was, in truth, very lonely without Jesse, especially as her walks were circumscribed by Green to the circle of one

mile from the Hermitage, and she was living among people who believed that making clothes for the poor was a work of merit. Mr. Halton might have suggested, that if half the money were expended on the calico, and the other half given to some unemployed woman for making it up, as much good might be done to the poor, and the clothes be better made. But this view of the case did not occur to his niece, and she stitched unceasingly as she sat on the shore, enjoying both the consciousness of doing a good deed, and that delicious mental idleness that makes unlimited needlework almost as dangerous for a girl of sixteen, as unlimited cigars are for her brother.

It was a relief to her loneliness when midsummer came, and Lewis with it; but he could only make short visits. He had left school, and was studying hard, preparing himself to go out to learn railway engineering with his uncle, who was in Spain; and he could only come to Sandmouth for a few hours at a time. There was a coach that left Enderby every morning and

returned in the afternoon; and by that coach he came every now and then, and after spending some hours at the Hermitage, he exercised his pedestrian powers by walking back to Enderby; but his visits were like angels', few and far between, and May found time hang very heavy on her hands.

Old Mrs. Freeman was slowly growing weaker, and her eyesight was failing, so that she was grateful for any one to read to her what she emphatically called "a chapter;" and May found herself going there day after day, to read or talk with her. She was glad to be useful to her old friend, partly out of affection for her, and partly from her half-acknowledged sense of responsibility in Jesse's absence, at this time, when he would have been a great comfort to his old grandmother. As to his going away, she told herself she was not to blame; she had only spoken as became her own position, and his unwarrantable presumption; but still, when sitting by Mrs. Freeman's window, she perceived the distant sea-line break into foam-caps, and saw the poor woman listening to

the rising wind, she felt she must try to comfort and cheer her in Jesse's absence.

One morning, after the violence of the storm had kept her awake all night, she insisted, much to Green's amazement, in struggling down through the wind and rain to the shop, to persuade Mrs. Freeman that tempests never blow on both sides of the world at once, and that, therefore, it must be fair weather where Jesse was.

"Would you mind reading the prayers about ships, Miss Cressingham, dear?" was the old woman's reply. "It's there, where I've turned the page down, but I can't see to read it."

May read it, and inwardly prayed that Jesse might come back, and tell her that he had not gone away merely because she was unkind to him.

"I wonder if he would have stopped if I had asked him," she said aloud; but there was no reply. "He must be grown quite a man now, Mrs. Freeman."

"Yes, if he be alive," said the old lady, dropping even her knitting, as the wind

burst against the house with a sound as if of an explosion, and then was heard sweeping over the trees in the inn garden opposite.

"Oh! do you think he went because of what I said to him? It was so little. I don't think it could have been," said May, in deep distress. "He would have come back again, if it had been for that he went away."

"Oh, no, Miss May, he would not. He said he would never come back for you to call him a servant, when he had kept away from sea so long, and worked at anything you wanted, just to please you."

"Then that was very unreasonable, Mrs. Freeman," said May, struggling hard for composure; "very foolish and wrong, and I am glad you never told me that before." And she fairly burst into tears at the thought of her playmate in danger, and at the memory of her own unkind words. She knew she had sorely wounded him; she had meant to do it, and she had succeeded but too well, and now she repented bitterly. She knew well enough when she spoke to him, that he had never considered himself a servant and

dependent, and that he had stayed at the cottage, waiting on all her whims, only because he loved her, and thought she wanted his services. He had as much right as any one to express his dissatisfaction at anything she had done. It had been a mere instinct of pride that made her rebuke him as she had done; and many were the tears she shed over the reflection that he was now in danger, in consequence of her unkindness and ingratitude. The sorrow these reflections caused her produced a rather salutary effect on May, and for a little time made her endeavour to conquer both her pride and temper; and perhaps, if Mr. Halton had at this time placed her in a good school, or brought her home to his wife's care, the self-willed girl might have been gently trained into a reasonable and patient woman. But it was May's fate to learn the lessons of humility and submission through a hard struggle, and her guardian incurred a heavy responsibility in leaving her to herself. He was sowing the wind, and unhappily she, as well as he, would have to reap the whirlwind.

Mr. Halton had asked his brother and sister-in-law to take charge of his ward; but they were still abroad, and advised him to find a good school for her without delay. Mr. Halton knew this advice was sound; but it was a great effort to him to find this unexceptionable school. May too, wrote to him, begging him not to take her away from the Hermitage, quoting Dr. Grahame's opinion, that the sea air was necessary for her health. Mr. Halton did not stop to inquire if this were a really gravely expressed opinion of the doctor, but accepted the theory because it was easier for him to leave his niece at Sandmouth for the present. And as a compromise between the course he knew he ought to take, and the course he had hitherto taken, he engaged a governess for her. An acquaintance of his wife's was just at this time anxious to recommend a governess, and Mr. Halton, observing that Margaret could not want a very clever teacher as yet, engaged the lady without more delay, and sent her down to the Hermitage, where she soon made herself thoroughly detested by her pupil,

and by every one else who had anything to do with her. Miss Primer's first collision was with Josiah Freeman. He had recently bought the Hermitage; it had been in the market for a very low sum, and having saved a few hundreds, he could not resist the temptation of buying it, although he had to borrow money to complete the purchase. Miss Primer had not been a week at the Hermitage before she discovered that the house was thoroughly out of repair, and in her zeal for her employer's interests, she insisted on Mr. Freeman's setting it completely to rights. Josiah found, on examining the terms of the agreement made by the late owner with Mrs. Cressingham, that he was bound to keep the house in thorough repair, and saw himself involved in considerable expense thereby. He had already found that his new purchase was a mistake; for he had incurred heavy losses in his business, and wanted the hundreds he had spent on it. He had had to raise money to complete the purchase by mortgage, and now had to procure more by a second on his own house and shop. He

had now to new roof it, and make other repairs, and in his uneasy financial position found his late acquisition likely to prove a mill-stone round his neck, and he cordially hated the governess for her zeal in Mr. Halton's behalf.

May had welcomed Miss Primer with raptures, but soon began to wish her far away. A less congenial companion could hardly have been selected for her. She was too superficially instructed herself to make study agreeable to her pupil, and too ill-tempered to allow her to enjoy idleness happily. She was in a fever of perpetual fret with Green, and vented her displeasure with her, upon May, whom she worried almost into illness by her continued reproof and criticism. Downright blame she rarely tried, because her pupil's unruly spirit revolted against it, for May would leave the house and wander along the shore for many hours, until James and Green would come out, and partly persuade and partly compel her to return; or she would go down to Sandmouth, and sit in the back parlour behind the shop until

it grew dark, and Mrs. Freeman, suspecting the state of affairs, told Josiah to take her home himself. After a dozen experiments of this kind, the governess thought it wisest to avoid further contests with her pupil, and made no further efforts to control or teach her, but wrote her own letters, and made her own gowns, while May read novels, and stories of travels and voyages, and wondered when Jesse would come back. The winter had come in with storms of unusual violence, and her self-reproach on Jesse's account was very keen. Every week brought news of shipwrecks and disasters, and she could think of little else but him. When Lewis came she could forget her secret anxiety, but as soon as she was again left alone with Miss Primer's unsympathetic companionship, the painful recollection would return again.

"Oh, do come again, Lewis ; we are so dull without you," she said plaintively, when he was saying good-bye. "We have nothing but such sad stories about the coasters being sunk, to think of; and I am so miserable."

"I'll come again before long. But I must go this minute," said Lewis. "I shall not catch the coach if I don't, and it is not an evening to find a walk to Enderby a nice thing."

"I will walk with you to the Blue Lion," said May; and as Miss Primer made an objection, she insisted on going, even although Lewis observed,—

"You will have a wet walk home if you do. There will be a gale to-night."

"There is always a gale now," said May. "It is so sad to hear of the wrecks." Not for the world would she have spoken of Jesse, lest Lewis should ask why he went away.

"Ah! but for wrecks, the *garde douloureuse* would be the place to live at," said Lewis.

"Don't call it *garde douloureuse*," replied May pettishly. "I wish I were there now."

"Well then, Rawlstone Hall would be the place to hear of shipwrecks in. It is near Corton Roads, and Jesse Freeman said there were once two hundred lighters lost there in one storm."

May glanced at the dull, leaden-coloured, tumbling water, and shivered.

"You had better go back before the wind gets stronger," said Lewis considerately.

But no; May chose to go on, and after bidding him good-bye at the door of the Blue Lion Inn, where the coach was waiting, she crossed the street, and paid a visit to Mrs. Freeman.

"Have you had a letter?" she asked anxiously; for it was now more than three months since they had heard from Jesse, and he had written to say he was sailing to Australia.

Mrs. Freeman shook her head.

"No, not yet. I cannot think why the boy don't write."

"Boy! Why he must be a man now," said Mrs. Josiah cheerily. "Don't go fancying mischief about him. He can't be blown away by the wind like a feather. Eh, Lord! what is that!" she cried, as a tremendous burst of wind struck the side of the house, and seemed to shake it to its very foundations.

"Bolt the doors, and put up the shutters," cried Josiah to the shop-boy. "It is a tempest coming."

There was a shouting in the street, and a noise as of men hurrying past down to the beach. May guessed that one of the lighters anchored off the town was already in difficulty. The shutters were put up to protect the shop windows that looked towards the wind; but nothing could shut out the lightning, which flashed through every crevice. May saw the look of despair on Mrs. Freeman's face, and knew what she was thinking of.

"I daresay Jessé is now in a calm somewhere. I daresay his captain is longing for wind," she said. "Whereabouts is he now, I wonder?"

"You can't be going home, Miss Cressingham," was said by Mrs. Josiah, after a long silence, during which they all listened to the wild whistling of the wind. "Will you stop and have a bit of supper with grannie?"

May stayed very willingly. Mrs. Josiah brought in a tray, set out rather ostentatiously

with silver spoons and cut glass. She was followed into the room by her little girl, old Mrs. Freeman's especial pet.

"There, Lucy, sit by your grannie's bed, and tell her not to worry herself," said Mrs. Josiah. "There is no need to be thinking of Jesse every time the wind blows. It is fair weather, most like, where he is now, ain't it, Miss Cressingham?"

May agreed that it was most probable; but as the uproar without continued, she found it very difficult to think Jesse was safely sailing on a smooth sea, and Mrs. Freeman gave up the attempt altogether. The gale increased, and her terrors increased every hour, while listening to it. At dusk, James, the gardener, appeared, but not to escort May home; he had got quite wet through in coming, and said she must stop where she was that night, if Mrs. Freeman could manage it.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Josiah; "if she can sleep in the little room where Lucy is; and I'll take Lucy upstairs."

So Lucy's bed in the little cupboard room

adjoining that of Mrs. Freeman, was prepared for May, and James departed.

"It's an awful night," he said to Josiah, as he went out. "There are three colliers ashore between here and Rockhead, and they say a brig has foundered out by the cliff."

May closed the door to shut out his words.

"Well, Mrs. Freeman, shall I read to you?" she asked, with a desperate effort at cheerfulness. "What shall it be? here is the newspaper."

"Read the prayers for them out at sea, my dear," said the poor woman, shivering; and May shivered herself as she heard the wind shake the casement. She went for the Prayer-Book. It was with difficulty she commanded her voice.

"Thou, O Lord, that stillest the raging of the sea, hear, hear us and save us, that we perish not."

But as she read, a vision of splitting sails and rending spars came before her, and she hid her face on the bed.

"My dear, don't stay here with me," said Mrs. Freeman. May obeyed, and went to the little room assigned to her, but she could not sleep. The lightning glared into the unshuttered window, and the wind from the chimney shook the bed-curtains, and blew down the strings of shells and seaweeds Jesse had long ago hung over the mantel-shelf. May got up—she had not undressed—and sat on the bed, listening to the heavy shock of the waves on the beach, and the shouts and cries of the men engaged in saving the boats.

"Hear us and save us, that we perish not," repeated the girl, over and over again, while she gathered up fondly the scattered shells that lay on the floor. At last she went back to Mrs. Freeman, and found her sobbing, and Mrs. Josiah trying vainly to comfort her.

"Come, grannie, if it is so, and the boy is drowned, it's the Lord's will, and you must take it so, and it is better he should go now, young and innocent as he is, rather than live among the sailors and learn all their wickedness, and be as one of those that perish everlastingly."

This was poor comfort. May went back to her cupboard again, and thought of Jesse, and listened to the wind till the morning came. The tempest did not abate with the daylight. It was not till the end of the day that the gardener could come and take her home, during a temporary lull; but the gale lasted three days longer, and during that time May could attend to nothing. Miss Primer was vexed; but her pupil was beyond her control, and she solaced herself with her needle, and with fretting and scolding Green.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE BEACH.

IT was the determined hostility of the governess to Green that at last provoked May to flat rebellion. Miss Primer's power of annoying her pupil was limited, for May could escape on to the beach, and stay there, regardless of rain or cold ; but she persecuted the poor housekeeper with unremitting censure and complaint, and at last dismissed her summarily from her pupil's service. May remonstrated and implored by turns, but Miss Primer would not be moved, and at last May rose in revolt.

"It is too much to bear, and I will not have it," she said, with flashing eyes and flaming cheek. "In my own house I will keep my own servants ; my uncle said I might, and Green shall not go. You can stay here, Miss Primer, if you like, but Green shall stay too, and no one shall give her

any orders but me, and she shall do all she thinks right."

After hearing this, Miss Primer thought it necessary for her dignity to go; and finding a home that suited her much better, she made no appeal to Mr. Halton. May wrote her own version of the matter to her uncle.

"I did not want to vex her, but I could not let her be so ill-tempered to my servant; and I am very glad she is gone, for she was very unkind to me, and was very angry when I went to read to dear old Mrs. Freeman, or made clothes for the poor. I wish you would send me some nice young lady, whom I can like."

"Whom you can bully, you mean," observed old Mr. Evanshaw, to whom Mr. Halton showed this epistle. "Mr. Halton, you ought to send that girl to school tomorrow. If I were her guardian she should not be a week longer there."

But Mr. Halton was going to Italy for a holiday, and could not find a school in such a hurry, and so he concluded his niece

might very well remain where she was till he came back. What better employment than reading to sick people, and making clothes for the poor, could be found for his little ugly wayward niece? He could leave her there at Sandmouth for that spring and summer safely.

If he could have had a bird's-eye view of the seabeach at Sandmouth, and seen the tall slender girl, sitting idly there, playing with her needle, absorbed in day dreams, or listening to the complimentary speeches of Lewis Grahame, he might have changed his mind, and postponed his Italian trip till he had bestowed her safely.

"Well, I won't say I should not have recognised you, if that is to be turned against me," said Lewis; "but still you are altered. I cannot go back from what I have said,—altered you are, and I am very glad of it."

"I did not know I was so unpleasing before," May answered roguishly. "How good of you to bear with me so long."

"It did not need much goodness to do

that," he answered, taking his seat beside her.

Lewis had come to Enderby at Easter, and was to remain there with his father until his final departure for Spain. He came over to Sandmouth every day, or stayed several nights at the Blue Lion, and was constantly at the Hermitage. Perhaps he acted by his father's wishes in making himself so intimate there. Dr. Grahame knew the value of Rawlstone Hall very well, and certainly never seemed to grudge the time his son spent at Sandmouth, as so much taken from himself.

"I have seen Rawlstone," said Lewis; and May listened eagerly to all he could tell. Her old home was an object of almost worship to her; she wanted to hear every little detail, and Lewis was only sorry he had not visited every field and corner, that he might satisfy her curiosity.

"You should go there yourself," he concluded, when he had told all he could, and her interest was still unabated. "You should make your uncle take you there for

a visit. You could stay at the little inn in the village,—the Cressingham Arms,—and see everything,—learn all the secrets of the *garde douloureuse* before you have to take command there.”

“It won’t be a *garde douloureuse* for me. I shall be so happy,” said May confidently. “Besides, who can I find to hold it against? are there smugglers? I wish there were pirates now-a-days; it would be a splendid place for resistance. I would summon all the tenants, and keep the enemy at bay, while some messenger, on the fleetest horse in the stable, galloped to Yarmouth to bring assistance.”

“Do you like riding?” asked Lewis. “I should so like to teach you to ride, if we could have some horses.”

“I used to ride, you know,” she replied, “the autumn before last; only a pony though, which used to be led.” And she looked over the rolling water, glittering like steel in the sunlight, and sighed. It was seven months since they had heard of Jesse, and Josiah seemed hopeless of his being alive.

Mrs. Freeman and May would not give up hope; but hope deferred maketh the heart sick.

Lewis was eager to begin the riding lessons, and the horses were procured by the innkeeper, and the rides were one continued delight to May while they lasted. The rapid movement, and the free open country to her who had been for a year and more condemned to the narrow circle of the beach, garden, and village road, were an old joy revived, and Lewis was most agreeable as a companion, and careful as a riding master. But one day, May, disregarding his orders, leaped her horse over a low wall and lamed him, and the next morning riding was out of the question.

"Well, a walk along the shore will be a change," said she, philosophically, when Lewis arrived with the news that the horse must be left to rest; and she ran up stairs to put on her hat, shook down the long golden curls over her shoulders, to relieve the black monotony of her dress, and came down as happy as if the poor horse were waiting at the door.

They walked along the shore in the direction opposite to the town.

"I have not been here for a long time," May said. "Green won't let me come so far alone. Do you see that rock sticking up at the side of the cliff? There used to be some lovely little blue flowers on it at this time of the year; we used to climb up and get them."

"How could you get up? that rock is twelve feet high, at least."

"Oh, you must come round here to see. Look; we used to climb the cliff there, and then step on that broad stone that sticks out of the side,—we used to call it the draw-bridge,—and so get on the table-rock, as we called it."

"We? why I am sure I never was with you."

"Oh! I and Jesse, not you;" and May could hardly help blushing, as she remembered Jesse's jealousy of him.

"Oh, Jesse, your groom. Ah, well, I suppose a servant could hardly object to your going up there; but I do, Margaret, most strongly object to it; it is not safe."

"And why you?" asked May, unconsciously feeling herself Jesse's champion.

"Because I care for you so much,—you don't know how much," said Lewis, in a low voice.

During the past week May had been wakening to the fact that Lewis was trying to play the lover, and like many girls of her age, the consciousness of this was very irksome to her. A handsome lass, who, knowing herself rich in worldly goods, looks upon marriage as a thing she can command at her own time, is sometimes inclined to regard love-making as an impertinent annoyance; and she had already begun to tire of Lewis's flattering speeches, and now turned pettishly against them.

"You really are beginning to talk very stupidly," she observed. "I shall go up, and you may come or not, as you like." And she climbed up the cliff at the place she had pointed out.

"Take care, the drawbridge is loose," cried a man who stood on the shore. May looked round; he was a sailor, and had just

stepped out of a small boat which was on the sand, and he was still standing ankle deep in water. She could not hear distinctly, as the wind blew from her to him, and she put her hand behind her ear and called out,—

“What do you say?”

“The drawbridge is loose, don’t go on it,” he shouted in a loud voice, and he ran across the beach and came under the cliff where she stood. “I say, Miss May, you will get hurt,” he said, speaking quickly and breathlessly. “I see a great crack over the drawbridge, and it is coming down.”

If he had not used the old name, known only to them, May would not have recognised Jesse for the moment, for fifteen months of active exertion had increased his growth to man’s proportions; exposure to the elements had embrowned and coarsened his skin, while the down that was beginning to shade his lips and cheeks, only as yet seemed a darker hue of the bronze; but the word they had always used for the projecting stone by which she stood, gave

her the hint, and with a scream of joy she cried,—

“It is you, it is! Oh, when did you come back?”

She was turning to come down the narrow path, but Lewis, who had now seen the great crack extending over the stone she had been preparing to step on, ran up, and said anxiously,—

“Come down, Margaret, come down, the man is right;” and he made a step up the path, when May, in pure spite at his interference, sprang on to the so-called draw-bridge, and crossed to the table-rock beyond. The heavy stone wanted but the little jar given it by her tread, and as she passed safely over it, it fell from the cliff with a loud crash and a huge cloud of dust.

It fell harmless, for the two young men were on one side upon the cliff, where she had climbed up; and they thought only of her, while she, terrified by Lewis’s cry and Jesse’s oath, turned in sickening terror lest they were hurt. However, a moment’s anxiety was all that either she or they suffered.

The dust cleared away in a few seconds, and they saw her safe above them on the table-rock, and she, secure on her perch, was recovering breath while she looked at Jesse, whom she found it difficult to recognise as her former playmate.

“Is it really you, Jesse?” she asked doubtfully. The tremendous oath that burst from him as the stone fell had astounded her; his voice and manner was as much changed as his face,—he had grown a thorough salt-water sailor, and she could not accept him as Jesse at all.

“Have you been home, and seen them all?” she asked from her high platform, some feet above his head. “Mrs. Freeman is very ill.”

“Ay, she is badly,” he answered shortly; and then he added carelessly, as if he were talking to a shipmate, “I came yesternight, and I think I’ll stop a week ashore.”

“One week ashore, Jesse; have not you come home for good?”

Something in his face answered as plainly as words could, that he had not come home to be her slave any more; that he meant to

ignore their former relative positions; and that, rough and rude as he now was, he claimed equality with her, and would answer her on no other terms.

"I think," he said slowly, and as if speaking to himself, "I will go into the coasting trade while the old woman lives; but that's as may be."

She saw he meant her to feel she had no right to question him about his plans. She felt pained, and perhaps insulted; and yet she wished to talk to him, to hear him speak cordially to her, to let him know that she had been wanting him to come back. She wished he would look at her and smile kindly; she felt so very glad to see him back, though he was so bearish and surly. She was waiting for him to speak, while he below, stood with his hands in his pockets, looking at the sea and not at her.

Lewis spoke at length.

"How are you to get down, Margaret?"

May advanced to the edge of the rock.

"I must jump down," she said confidently.

"Jump! nonsense, it's impossible!" cried

Lewis. "You would break some limb if you tried. For heaven's sake don't try; I will go and fetch a ladder or something."

"Here, let me lift you down," said Jesse, with surly triumph. "I can do that easy, and it is the only way too. Come."

"No; wait a moment, Margaret. I can help you, up from above," said Lewis, scrambling up the cliff over May's head. Jesse looked up at him and shook his head.

"He can't do it, he'll have no hold up there," he said. "Here, let me catch you May, I'll hold you easy;" and he planted one foot on the base of the rock, and stretched up his arms that seemed equal to the task of holding fast Hercules. Had he looked more like Jesse, May would never have hesitated; had he been any one of the Sand-mouth fishermen, she would have dropped quietly into that firm grasp, and thanked him as she was placed safely on the ground: But she felt a decided reluctance to give him the triumph—as she saw it would be—of helping her down in opposition to Lewis, who was wishing to do it. Yet she

turned away from the hand Lewis was stretching down to her. He had climbed to a perch on the cliff above where she stood, and, grasping a young tree with one hand, stretched down the other arm towards her, offering to help her up.

"Come, Margaret, come," he said.

"She'll pull you down, and herself too," growled Jesse. "Here, May, let me have hold of you."

May was standing irresolute; a feeling of fright and responsibility coming over her as she saw their readiness to quarrel about her. She did not know which to turn to. She would fain have trusted to Jesse's stronger arm, but she hesitated, and looked up at Lewis. She saw that Jesse was right, and that he had no power of drawing her up, for the branch he held would only support his own weight.

"No, thank you, Lewis, I dare not," she said; and turning right away from Jesse, she sprang clear off the rock, and fell on the sand below. Both Jesse and Lewis uttered a cry of terror as they saw^r her fall.

She was stunned for a moment, but as Jesse knelt down and raised her head from the ground, she recovered consciousness, but only with a scream of pain.

"Where is it? Where are you hurt, dear?" he asked, hurriedly feeling her arms and wrists, as if to see if the mischief were there.

Lewis dashed down the steep cliff and reached them panting. "Is she killed? Is she killed?" he cried in terror.

"No, no; it's nothing, only my foot," May gasped, wringing her hands to suppress screaming. She saw Jesse's face of anxiety. Had she looked at Lewis, she would have seen he was still more terrified; but she looked only at Jesse, and she tried to set him at ease.

"How stupid you both are! Leave me alone; I shall be better directly."

Jesse raised her more on his arm.

"Run to the boat there," he said to Lewis. "There is a pail there; you can fill it with water."

Lewis felt that Jesse knew more what he was about than he did, and obeyed. He brought water, and Jesse bathed her face and

temples with it, for she was nearly fainting with pain; but as soon as she could speak again, she tried to comfort them both.

"It is nothing to signify, I tell you. I have only hurt my foot, or broken it; but it will be right soon, I daresay. Oh, dear!" The poor girl's stoicism gave way at last, and she shrieked with pain as they tried to raise her.

"That won't do; she must lie where she is," said Jesse, who still held her on his arm. "Fetch up the sail that is rolled up in the boat, it will make her a pillow; and we'll see to her foot."

The sail was brought by Lewis, and May was propped up and supported on it, while Jesse examined her foot and ankle. He said it was not broken, only sprained, and began to bathe it with the salt water; while Lewis fanned her with his sailor's cap. It was all they could do to keep her from fainting.

"Oh, it is better, a little; it is really," May sighed, after half an hour had passed in this way. "Oh, thank you both so much. Can you get me home now?"

"I will stay with you while he runs and gets the fly from Sandmouth," said Lewis quickly.

"The boat is there," replied Jesse, with some contempt for the blindness which could overlook that quick and easy mode of transport. "You bring the things; I'll carry her."

"I will carry her," said Lewis, growing very red and angry.

"Get off; you'd let her fall!" answered the sailor, glancing disdainfully at Lewis's slight figure; and lifting up May as if she were still a little child, Jesse walked with her to the boat. It was some way from the water now, for the tide had fallen, and Lewis made but a poor figure as he tried to push it off.

"Can't you do it?—then I will," said Jesse, who stood waiting with May in his arms; and placing her down in it as softly as if she were a piece of china, he gave it a shove with all his strength, and sent it grating down the pebbly sand till it floated. He ran down with it till the water was over his knees, and then climbing in, took the oars and pulled out.

"Come for me then," said Lewis.

"Come along then," said the sailor grimly ;
"I'll wait."

"Oh, go closer for him," said May faintly ;
"don't make him get wet." But Jesse heeded not her remonstrance, and calling out to Lewis,—

"You run along and get to the Hermitage, and tell them she is coming," he began rowing homewards, and Lewis hastened along the beach in the same direction.

Jesse rowed hard, and said never a word. May lay still in the boat, unable to speak. She was faint again with the pain, but if she had not been, she would have hesitated to speak to him, in his present strange mood of surly silence. They came at length opposite the Hermitage, and the boat grounded easily, but even that slight shock gave May fresh agony. Lewis was already there, trying with James to carry a sofa down to the water's edge ; but Jesse lifted May out and carried her as before, across the beach, and then straight into the house, and calling Green to point the way, went without stopping up the

stairs, and laid her on her own bed. May opened her eyes and tried to thank him, but he was off already, saying to Green he would run to Sandmouth and send the doctor, if he were at home. Lewis waited, walking restlessly up and down the garden, to hear the doctor's report; but after he had come, and pronounced the mischief to be only a severe sprain, Lewis was not satisfied. The Sandmouth doctor was only a druggist, with some slight knowledge in casualties, and Lewis hastened away to Enderby to fetch his father.

Dr. Grahame came quickly, but confirmed the opinion of the Sandmouth practitioner, in so far that there was nothing more the matter than a sprain; but it was, he said, a bad one, and May would not be able to walk for many weeks. And with this comforting assurance she was left to bear the pain in silence; but her joy in knowing that Jesse had come back, made her very cheerful after the first twelve hours.

"Oh, Green! how happy Mrs. Freeman must be now. When did he come back; do you know?"

"Four days ago, miss. He came here from Yarmouth. He was taking a row along the shore when he saw you going up the cliff."

"He was not coming to see me, then," said May sadly. Green was silent. She pretty well knew the circumstances of Jesse's leaving Sandmouth, and her young mistress's share therein.

"Will you go to him from me, Green, and thank him?" said May earnestly. "I shall send and ask him to come as soon as I can be downstairs again; but do go and tell him how I thank him."

She ascertained that Green did give the message, but she feared there was no response, at least none that Green could report. She saw he had not forgiven her, and she could not wonder at it. The more she thought of her last words to him, the more utterly cruel and ungrateful her own conduct appeared to her, and she longed to see him, and tell him how thoroughly sorry she was and had been.

May's self-reproach and penitence, and her continual fears for Jesse's safety, had so caused her thoughts to dwell on him, that he

had become, after Lewis, the most important unit of her small social interests. If she could have confided her anxieties to Lewis, and received sympathy from him, she might have pondered less over Jesse and his dangers. But Lewis had always despised Jesse, and would have laughed at her; so she said nothing to him of her lost playmate, and, unless when Lewis was at the Hermitage, thought of little else but Jesse. So, in proportion to the vexation of spirit his absence had caused her, was her satisfaction now in thinking he was returned; and she thought nothing of the pain her foot caused her, in comparison with the distress of being unable to come downstairs and see him.

Dr. Grahame came again at the end of a week, and brought her a letter from Lewis, who was obliged to start for London, and probably would not return to Enderby before he went to Spain. May was much distressed to know she should not see him again; but she forgot even him in her anxiety to get downstairs.

“Green says she will make me a bed in

the dining-room, and sleep in the study herself; and then I can lie on the sofa, and be wheeled into the parlour, and look out at the sea, doctor. I can't see it from this window."

"If you could be carried down without getting your foot hurt, I should like the plan," said the doctor. "You might then be wheeled on the sofa through the French window, and lie in the garden. Green has been saying to me, you are pining for fresh air. I think she is right; but can the gardener carry you down safely?"

"Jesse Freeman will carry her down, sir," said Green. "He is here every day, and he is stronger than James. He will carry her safely, I know."

"Very well then, take her down," said the doctor; "and let her be out in the air as much as possible; but remember, she must not put her foot to the ground for four weeks at least. If she does, it will never get well."

"Better put all the shoes for this poor foot in the attic, Green, dear," said May laughing; "and then Doctor Grahame will feel easy about me."

"It would not be a bad plan," said the doctor, shaking his fist in mock anger at her as he went out.

An hour afterwards, Green came with May's garden shawl. "Here, dear, the sofa is in the garden, and Jesse is here, and says he will carry you down easily; and while you are out in the garden, I will get James to help me move this furniture down to the drawing-room. Now, don't you be afraid; Jesse is grown quite a man now, and as strong as anything."

Jesse came in, looking much more like his former self, from the civilising influences of a week on shore, and a great alteration in his dress, which was no more sea-faring than what was common among the Sandmouth fishermen. It certainly was not fear that made May's heart beat so fast as he came in. Her smile of joyful recognition ought to have made him throw aside his surly, ill-tempered look; but it did not.

"Are you ready?" he asked, almost roughly. But he lifted her up with the gentlest care, and carried her down stairs into the garden,

as safely as he had brought her up from the boat. There she was laid on the sofa, and Green wrapped her shawl round her, while Jesse stood by, looking as if he cared only to be off; and after Green had found fault with the place chosen for the sofa, and made him and James move it several times into a better position, he suddenly asked whether he was wanted, and remarking he would be near, and could be fetched if he were, he went away, and May saw he did not wish her to thank him. She could not help crying, while she pretended to shade her eyes from the sun with her parasol, lest Green, who sat near, should see. How was she to tell him she was sorry for ever having spoken unkindly to him, if he would not stop and speak to her? But after May had eaten her dinner at a little table that James brought out, Green became very furious against Jesse.

“Stupid boy! What does he stop away for, when I want to go to my work?” she said. “Fetch him, James. Tell him Miss May can’t be left alone,—she can’t even pick up her handkerchief if she drops it,—and I

must go and see about the furniture, or she will have no bed to sleep on to-night."

James objected that perhaps Jesse had business of his own, and would not choose to stop loitering by Miss May's sofa all the afternoon; but Green cut him short, and called loudly for Jesse. He came; received Green's instructions in silence; promised to remain near, and call her if her young lady wanted her, and then he went to smoke his pipe at some little distance. He was determined not to give May an opportunity of speaking. But she was not to be baffled; and as soon as Green was gone, she let her parasol fly away in the wind, and called on him to come and bring it to her. Then he had to fix it to the table, and place it close at her elbow; and while he did so, she caught hold of his arm and made him prisoner.

"Jesse, now that we are alone, you must let me thank you a little for all you have done."

"I don't want thanking," he replied, looking at the ground. "I'm glad to see you downstairs again, and in the fresh sweet air

and the sun, but I don't care for you to thank me."

"Oh, but Jesse! I want to say it now, while I can. I am so sorry! I know I behaved so very unkindly to you. I am almost ashamed to see you. I know I was so very ungrateful to you, and treated you so ill. I am sure you have forgiven me; but I do not deserve that you should."

"No; you don't deserve it. You did not behave as you had ought to," he said in a very low voice. He had not forgiven her; he was devoting himself to her now with a very keen recollection of the wrongs he had suffered. He had never forgotten the unkind words he had heard from her, and he was all the more tenderly careful of her, now that he was forced to take care of her, because he had determined not to forgive her. She looked wistfully and inquiringly in his face, as he withdrew his hand from hers and stepped back a pace.

"Have not you forgiven me?" she asked. "I thought you had. I was very unkind, and very rude, and very wrong, but I have been so very sorry,—I cannot tell you how sorry;

and when the wind blew, I thought of you so——”

The real sadness of her voice and look overcame all Jesse's angry feelings.

“Did you? Did you think of me?” he responded quickly. “Then it's all over; and there's no harm done. And I don't know,” he added, anxious to make her happy, “as I might not say as it has been all for my good, seeing as how I've learned my trade, and can now shift for myself; and I've seen foreign countries, as I wished to.”

But this consideration failed to lighten May's self-reproach. “Are you still going to be a sailor, then?” she asked timidly. “Oh! have you not been in dreadful storms?”

“Oh, ay, we have; there was one last February, as I never thought I would come back again here. We never got an hour's sleep for seven days and nights; it was the fifteenth of February it began.”

“Oh! that was when we were praying so for you,” said May, bursting into tears; “and we thought you would be drowned.”

“Did you think of me then?” Jesse asked

eagerly. "I was thinking of you then, though I did not think I'd ever see you again."

He did not say how he had made up his mind when he went his voyage, that he would never see her again till he was grown so old that she must quite forget that he had ever been her servant; the angry sting of her scornful words had remained by him all the time he was away,—and when, two days after his return to Sandmouth, he took his way along the shore in his little boat, he had passed by the Hermitage, intending not to see her, unless she came to the village to find him, when she heard of his return. Her danger on the "Drawbridge," made him break his resolution, and her accident and helplessness changed him into her devoted servant again.

But all this he did not tell her; he hardly remembered it himself. He wanted to see her look happy again, and not cry so bitterly in remorse and self-reproach, and he sat down by her sofa, and began the story of his voyages. He had been to the West Indies, and from thence to Australia; and she listened in rapt amazement, not allowing him a mo-

ment's pause, and when Green came, and wanted her to be carried indoors, she refused to go, and kept him talking until even he agreed with Green, that it was growing too late for her to stay out longer, and he must help Green to lift the sofa in through the window into the drawing-room.

“But you will come again to-morrow?” May asked so beseechingly, that he could not have refused if he would; and he came every day to wait by her sofa and claim her sympathy for all his adventures. In spite of his manly stature, of which he was intensely proud, he was almost a boy still at heart; his very resentment had been that of a boy, and now it was over, their quarrel was forgotten as well as forgiven.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE BOAT.

BEFORE a fortnight was over, May's foot had so far recovered from the injury, that Jesse ventured to propose that he should take her out in the boat. He had contrived a kind of hand-barrow, on which he and James could easily carry her down to the landing-place. He brought from the village a trusty little skiff, which he drew up on the beach opposite the Hermitage, to be always in readiness ; in this she could lie comfortably among cushions and pillows, and be rocked on the smooth water in luxurious idleness. May was delighted ; the sky was now bright, and the sun warm, the light breeze on the water was invigorating and health-giving, and she passed many hours of each day in the little boat, lazily watching the clouds and the seagulls, or the rocks and trees on the shore, and listening to Jesse's stories of his voyage, as a marvellous romance, never ending and always new.

She had never in her life felt so happy, or enjoyed the boat so much as she did that summer, the very sea and sky looked brighter than they had ever looked before to her; she had not been so thoroughly at peace with herself and her conscience for a long time. Her griefs had all centred round the one point, her responsibility in driving Jesse away from her into danger and privation. This had haunted her sleeping and waking, and this was now all over,—he had forgiven her, and with her it was as it is with the children—to be forgiven is to be guiltless; and he had come back so gay, so clever, and so handsome (for in her eyes he was handsome), that she gloried in him, in his strength, in his courage, and his adventures. She was proud of having him for her friend, and in seeing him so devoted to her.

If Mr. John Halton had not been spending the autumn in Switzerland, while his brother Theodore supplied his place in the counting-house, and left papers for the Mineralogical Society sticking between the leaves of the ledger, he would have come and taken his niece away to school. He had found a school

at last, a most unexceptionable one, highly recommended by a fashionable acquaintance of his wife's; but he would not send May there until after his autumn trip was over. He fancied she would be very unwilling to go, and there would be the servants to dismiss, and many things to attend to. So he resolved to wait till he came home in October.

Meantime, May went on making a hero of her sailor friend; there was no longer any intellectual superiority on her side, for she had learned nothing from Miss Primer but some words of foreign languages, and a few notes of music; she had read only novels and books of travels; she was Jesse's inferior in the mental development given to the mind by steady discipline, and the necessity of prompt obedience to his superiors on ship-board. He was three years older than she was, and she instinctively recognised his greater energy and force of character, and he had seen enough in his voyages to make him appear in her eyes better informed than herself. It never entered her head now, that there was any condescension on her part in her friendship

for him ; there was an air of conscious independence about him that established equality, she had seen it, and felt it painfully, in the first moment when he appeared under the drawbridge stone ; but now, though she still recognised it, it attracted her to him instead of repelling her. It made him an equal,—he was her friend,—and when, day after day, she listened to his thrilling tales of past dangers by sea, he became in her eyes a real hero, and she worshipped him as such. Nor did he seem less a hero for his tender care of her on all occasions, above all when she remembered her own ingratitude to him. The attitude of moral defiance he had assumed, only roused her wish to please him, and established his influence over her ; and she gave herself up to the contemplation and worship of her idol, careless of consequences.

One day, an actinia, a perfect miracle of beauty, came floating by the boat. Jesse bared his arm to the shoulder to pull it up, and gave it to May to look at ; but while he was drawing his sleeve down again, she saw a blue tattooing on his arm, of three letters, M A Y. . . .

She commented on it before she had time to think.

Jesse laughed. "Yes, I put it there one day when I was at sea; one likes to have something to remember home by; and yours was a nice short name, it did for Sandmouth and home too."

May laughed too, and felt it was very nice to be thought of and remembered far away in distant countries, over the wide waters; and yet, when they came to land, and the tide being low, and the landing-place impracticable, he took her in his arms, and carried her on shore, as he had often done during the first week after her accident; she blushed till she was red as the summer rose, and thanked him more curtly than ever before.

After this, it dawned upon her that she cared for him more than for any one else; and though this had certainly long been the case, yet it came to her like a new revelation. She was not quite without a warning presentiment where this friendship must end; but she silenced the unwelcome voice of warning, saying to herself, she was too young yet for

such questions to trouble her; and then she pondered how it could be contrived to keep Jesse always on shore. When she grew up she would give him a ship—but only for the coasting trade, not for a long voyage: she was determined he should not go round Cape Horn again.

“Now, Jesse, promise me you will never go to sea again.”

“Why, May? Miss May, dear, I cannot promise; this is my trade. I’ve got no other.”

“But if you had another, you would stay—wouldn’t you?” she asked eagerly. “I’ve planned it all, Jesse. I am to live at Rawlstone, you know, as soon as I get a little older. It is close to Yarmouth; and I shall have a yacht, and you will manage it for me: that will do, won’t it?”

Jesse laughed outright. “No, no!” he said merrily: “that won’t do at all. I must be a regular skipper, or have a ship of my own.”

“Well, then; you shall have a ship of your own, a little one like Mr. Lockwood’s,” said May, “and go up and down anywhere along the coast; but don’t go a long voyage again,

Jesse. I will make my uncle find you a coaster at once."

"Thank you, dear Miss May," said Jesse gratefully; "but that would not suit me. I could not be content, I am sure, with along-shore sailing; I must either give up the sea altogether, and learn some other trade, as the old woman at home wants me to, or go on blue water again."

"Oh, no, no! you must not do that," said May, hurriedly; "my uncle will find you something to do. I'll ask him."

Jesse shook his head, and busied himself with a refractory rowlock.

* * * * *

Old Mrs. Freeman had been growing weaker all the summer; and as the autumn came, it was evident she was sinking.

"I should like to see Miss May, Josiah: do you think she could come so far?" she asked of her elder grandson.

"Oh, I think so. She gets about the house now with a stick, I hear," said Josiah. "Jesse could take a message to her. He is all day there with the boat now."

"I am so glad they are friends again," said Mrs. Freeman.

"Oh, yes! they are friends enough," said Josiah; and there was a curious smile on his face for a moment, though it vanished completely as he went into the other room and sat down to his books.

"It is that cursed house as I bought will ruin us," he said to his wife. "I was a cursed fool to buy it: I shall be swamped with it."

"Oh, don't, don't talk so, Josh!" said his wife, laying her hand on his shoulder: "you may pull through yet; poor grannie will leave us something when she goes, you know."

"No she won't, it is to be for Jesse; and her cottage at Filby too, though that is worth nothing, for all she thinks so much of it, it would not sell for a hundred pounds."

"Well, he will lend you the money, whatever it is, I know," said Mrs. Josiah, soothingly.

"Well if he did, I must support him: what is he to do, unless he goes back to sea?"

"Miss Cressingham might help us, perhaps," said Mrs. Josiah. "If she would speak to her uncle, and get him to lend you some money—

give us the rent of the Hermitage in advance, that would be a help. I should ask her to write to him. I am sure she would, if Jesse asked her. She would do anything to pleasure him, I think, she is that fond of him."

"If she should marry him some time," said Mr. Freeman meditatively.

"Josiah! my goodness!" gasped his wife in amazement.

"Well, it would not surprise me if she did," said Mr. Freeman. "It might be; she is always with him, and you know, though she is born a lady, yet her bringing up is not better than yours or mine; and he is a sharp lively lad, and a handsome too; and though he is only a sailor, you know he might have been something higher if he would have listened to us, and got schooling."

"Well, never mind all that now," said Mrs. Josiah, soothingly; for she was inclined to think her husband was taking leave of his senses. "You go and tell Miss Cressingham grandmother wants to see her."

Josiah went, thinking it would not be a bad idea to get May to write to Mr. Halton, and

ask him to come to his help by paying him the rent of the Hermitage in advance; he allowed her to perceive he was very doleful, and let her ask questions, and hear as much of his difficulties as he was minded to impart, namely, that repairing the roof had put him to heavy expenses, and he was much in need of ready money. More he did not wish her to suspect. He knew Halton was a man more likely to assist a disabled ship, than a sinking one, and what he did say was quite sufficient to make her promise to write. May wrote the letter, while Josiah went back to Sandmouth to send the fly kept at the Blue Lion to the Hermitage, to take her down to the shop.

To let May write to her uncle, was the most impolitic thing Mr. Freeman could have devised, for Mr. Halton could not but resent his niece being spoken to on the subject; and he was moreover angry with her, for her conduct towards Miss Primer; but Josiah was too desperate to see this, and he felt a faint degree of hope when she told him she had written.

May found old Mrs. Freeman much altered, and very weak, but anxious to talk, principally about Jesse.

"I don't want him to go to sea again, I don't indeed, indeed, Miss; I am going to make him stay on shore. I've told you, my dear, that I have a little cottage and a garden of my own, though I've let some one live there when I came to be with Josiah. It is at Filby, my dear, not ten miles from your own home at Rawlstone; and I have seen a lawyer, and I have signed my name, and given it to Jesse when I'm dead; and then he'll feel as he has a home of his own."

"In your cottage, grannie? It's not big enough for a man to turn round in," said Josiah; "and there's half an acre of garden only. What is he to do there?"

"He can get work with the farmers if he settles down," said the old lady. "It's the cottage where his father was born, and he shall have it, and I'll leave him the little money I have, and I hope it will steady him."

"He will be steady without that, grannie,"

said Jesse, coming in as she spoke. "I will try and find work of some kind on shore."

"God bless you, my boy; I knew you would," said the old woman, turning fondly towards him. "How well you're looking;" and she went on talking, and praising her darling, till May, who had been deep in thought, broke in with,—

"I've got a plan;—if Jesse is going to live at Filby. Dr. Grahame says the bailiff at Rawlstone is a bad farmer, and spoils the land; my uncle must send him away, and Jesse shall have his place."

"My dear Miss Cressingham, that's the very thing that would suit him," said Mrs. Freeman, rapturously.

"Why, I don't know anything about farming," observed Jesse, candidly.

"Oh, but you can learn," said May, with her usual confidence; "at least, enough to be bailiff. You would have to write a good hand, but I know you can do that, for I taught you. You used to write just like uncle John."

"So I do now," said Jesse; "I had one

of his letters you gave me, on ship-board, and I copied it over ever so often, o' nights. I can't tell my own writing from his now, and I don't think you could."

"Well, then, you must go to Filby and learn farming," said May; "and now I must go, for that flyman has been going into the public-house ever so many times, and he will be too tipsy to drive soon, if I stop any longer, I am sure."

"I will go with him on the box then," said Jesse; "and see you home safe,"

May went home, reflecting how fortunate it was that Jesse should have a cottage only ten miles from Rawlstone, so that when she went there, she could see him often. She resolved to persuade her uncle to let her go and live at Rawlstone, or at Yarmouth, till the present tenant had left the dwelling-house. Jesse, meantime, would learn farming, and then he should be bailiff, and should live in the bailiff's house, which should be put in order, and made very comfortable. And her airy castles went on a little beyond all that. She was thinking how handsome a gentleman her

sailor would make, if he were dressed as one; and how clever and good he was, and would make all the labourers and villagers love him and respect him, and he would become a gentleman, and no one would be surprised if some day—Her thoughts had gone at a greater rate than she meant. She tried to pull them up short, but they ran away again, and she was forced to let them have their own way. At any rate, she was resolved that Jesse should never again go to sea, or anywhere else away from her.

Jesse's thoughts, as he walked home on that October evening, were somewhat different; for he was poor and she was rich. He had for some weeks been slowly awakening to the consciousness, that what he felt for this girl was a love far stronger than friendship. He had known the last day or two, that he cared for nothing else in existence in comparison with her; and that he ought not, for his own happiness, to stay longer where he could see her every day; for that he was poor and she was wealthy, and it was unlikely such a social distance could be bridged

over. But of any other distinction he had not a notion. She was so little instructed in the outward graces belonging to her father's social position, and was mentally so entirely uncultivated, that Jesse recognised very little difference between her and Josiah's wife, except for a scarcely defined air of refinement, which he believed to belong to May herself, and to have nothing to do with class distinctions. In his eyes there was nothing but her wealth to divide him from her, and therefore he did not feel it was wrong of him to love her, however hopeless of a return his love might be. He felt no way unworthy of her; besides, he was young, and in the day-dreams of youth a possibility of good luck always plays a part. Josiah might trust him with a venture, or he might do something which should put him in the way of growing rich, before she was old enough to marry any one. Such had been the unreasoning pleasures of imagination in which he had indulged when he was idle; but now the suggestion of the bailiffship at Rawlstone was giving a touch of reality to all his fairy visions; he might grow

rich, he might become a gentleman, he might become necessary to her at Rawlstone, and—his thoughts ended in dreams, which he did not care to drive away.

“Have you heard that I am to be bailiff some day, at Rawlstone, when I’ve learned farming?” he said to his brother one day, by way of saying something cheering to a man who looked thoroughly down-hearted and miserable.

“You won’t get it. Mr. Halton will not give it to you, or let his niece do anything for you,” said Josiah. “He’s a real old curmudgeon; see what he has written to me!”

“Why, what have *you* been saying to him, that he calls you all these hard names for, Josh?” asked Jesse, amazed.

“Nothing that should make him take offence,” replied Josiah. “I wrote and told him I had been unfortunate in a speculation, and was troubled to meet the debts the repairing the Hermitage had made me owe; that mending the roof has done for me; it has thrown all behind, and what to do I don’t know; and I asked him if he could let me

have the year's rent in advance,—it's not much for him, only a hundred pounds,—and you see he won't. He is going to send his niece to school, and won't want the house any longer. Then I wrote and told him I was hard up, and I begged him to lend me the money as he had known me so long, and Mrs. Cressingham had trusted me so much, and he won't, and you see how he says it too."

"He should not write this way to a man that's down," said Jesse; "and you too, whom he has trusted to look after his niece all this time; he should treat you civiler than that."

"He'll not help me, nor you either, Jesse, you may be sure of that."

"I don't know as he can help Miss Cressingham making me her bailiff, as soon as she is of age."

"I should think you might be something better than bailiff at Rawlstone, if you liked," said Josiah, significantly; but Jesse looked so vague and unconscious that he had to explain further.

"I mean that she likes you, and I believe she would marry you if you asked her."

"I would not have thought it of you, Josh," cried Jesse, indignantly.

"Why, what is wrong in what I've said?" asked Mr. Freeman.

"Would you call it honest to ask a girl with all that money, to marry one, when she is almost a baby, and can't know her own mind a bit?"

"I don't call it wrong," said Josiah, coolly. "She is all alone, with no one to look after her. Mr. Halton is worse than nothing. She would be far better off with you for her husband, than with him for a guardian; a cold-hearted, selfish fellow as he is, who cares for nothing but himself and his dinner."

"You won't make me believe it's right for a poor sailor, like me, to persuade her to marry me, and give me all her money, when she don't know her right hand from her left," said Jesse, angrily; and he went out, but all his fairy visions were flown, and he was cruelly awakened to the anomaly of his position towards May. Far from rousing any hopes, Josiah's words had crushed the dream his brother had cherished, of some day be-

coming a rich man, and winning May for a wife, and made him alive to the great difference between them. He wondered sadly now, whether her readiness to accept all his services, her total want of shyness in talking to him, did not show that she considered him as one so inferior to her, as to be of another race; and he felt bitterly, that whatever Josiah might say, there was an impassible gulf between them. He was hopelessly wretched; and for two days he did not go to the Hermitage, to the utter alarm and bewilderment of May, who at last sent James to find him.

James came to the shop, and inquired for him. Old Mrs. Freeman heard he was come.

"Let him ask Miss Cressingham to come to me again," she said. "I did not say half I wanted to, to her the other day; and I'm going, I feel. Send the fly for her, please, at once."

May obeyed the summons immediately. She was crying when she came in, but Mrs. Freeman supposed it was the news of her own illness that had frightened her; and she

told her not to fret about her, for she was quite contented to die ; and then she addressed her very seriously and affectionately as if for the last time.

“ I hope, my dear Miss Cressingham, you won't forget your promise of trying to make Jesse the bailiff at Rawlstone when you are your own mistress. It will be a great comfort to me when I'm in my grave, to think he will be settled on shore.”

“ I can't do anything for him ; I have no power,” exclaimed May, bursting into tears. “ Uncle John is going to take me away, and send me to school ; he has written to me this morning. He is very cruel. I can't go to school. I won't go.”

“ Oh, my dear, you must not talk so. You ought to respect your uncle, and do what he wishes you. ‘ Honour thy father and thy mother,’ you know the Scripture says.”

“ I have not any father, or I would honour him ; and Uncle John is no uncle to me,” said May piteously. “ He is so unkind when he writes, and blames me cruelly ; and he sent me that horrid woman for a governess ;

and when she went away he was angry with me."

"Still, my dear, you should try and be dutiful to him, and love him all you can. If you don't, it may be very sad for you, poor dear," said the old woman fondly. "It was just what I sent to you to speak about."

And she gave a little good and kindly advice as to obeying Mr. Halton's wishes, and trying to make a friend of him; ending with, "You must be as a daughter to him, and show him obedience. And, dear Miss May, promise me one thing: you must never marry any gentleman whom your uncle does not like, promise me that."

May's eyes sought the floor. "No; I can't promise that. I'll think of what you say, but I can't promise; because I think if I ever do marry, it would be somebody whom he would not like at all."

She looked up as she spoke, and saw Jesse, who had come in silently. He was looking her way, and their eyes met; hers sank again, and she blushed crimson. Jesse turned and left the room instantly. Mrs. Freeman

saw nothing, and continued talking ; but little of what she said was heard by May. Jesse hastened through the parlour and shop, and gained the street, almost overwhelmed with the sudden revelation that glance had given, bewildered with the glimpse of unlooked-for happiness he had caught. He would have thought nothing of her saying that she should marry some one whom her uncle would not approve—it was like one of her wild, wayward speeches ; but as her eyes encountered his, he had seen such an expression of confusion and distress overspread her face, as to oblige him to apply the words to himself. An older man might have been less confident, and might have doubted whether some other actual lover might not then have been in her thoughts ; but at twenty, love is more hopeful, and he interpreted her blush to his own advantage. But he did not go into the house again, he had seen too much pain and embarrassment in her look to wish to meet her again till she sent for him ; and he thought it very likely that she, in her waywardness, would now keep away from him till she thought he

had forgotten her own self-betrayal. He half made up his mind he ought to walk up the street, and so be out of the way when she came through the shop; nevertheless he was still lingering near the door when she did come. But she had entirely forgotten her momentary indiscretion and confusion; she was looking for him to give her sympathy in her anxiety.

"Jesse, I'll go home now, but not in the fly. I want to talk to you. Can't you take me by the water?"

Jesse's heart gave a bound, but he answered very quietly, "Yes, if you like; but my boat is at the Hermitage. Will you wait while I fetch it?"

"No; take one of those," she answered, pointing to the boats drawn up on the beach at the bottom of the street. "I must have you row me home, for I want to talk to you. Go to the Lion, and tell them I shall not want the fly again."

And while he ran across to the inn-yard, she limped down the street, crossed the shingle, and had taken her place in a small

boat before he joined her. Jesse would have exercised a right of selection among the craft lying on the beach ; but as she was already seated in it, and complained of having hurt her foot in walking those few yards, he said nothing, but called a fisherman to help him to shove it off, and ran down after it, and jumped in.

May had already taken the helm. "Row straight out," she said impatiently. "No; don't go along the shore; row out straight."

She spoke with all her old imperiousness; but Jesse obeyed without hesitation, and went out to sea nearly a mile; but at last he stayed his efforts. "I think we had better not go farther out, there will be wind. Shall I turn towards home?"

"No; not yet," said May, who had sat in perfect silence all the time. "I don't want to get home yet. You need not go farther out if you don't like; let us stay here. I have something to say to you, and we can't get out of hearing on shore you know."

She looked strangely excited, and he listened in wondering anxiety.

"Jesse, I won't go to school. I am determined. I'll run away, and hide myself from my uncle. I will, indeed I will," she cried, her little hand grasping the side of the boat almost convulsively. "I won't go; I'm resolved I won't."

"Send you to school!" said Jesse, in his astonishment, stopping rowing, and holding the oars suspended over the water. "Send you away from Sandmouth?"

"Yes; to a school among children. I, who am almost a woman. He says he is determined to do it." She paused, waiting to hear an indignant exclamation from Jesse, but there was none. Dismay and grief kept him silent. For one hour he had been intoxicated with hope. He had madly fancied that her love for him would overstep the boundaries of their respective stations in life; and now he heard a sentence of eternal separation in this word "school." It was not only distance that would divide them, but wealth and education would separate them more than a thousand miles of space. She would become a lady, proud of her acquirements and posi-

tion, and he must be forgotten, or remembered only as the rough sailor who once rowed her boat whenever she ordered him.

May saw Jesse's face change, and though she could not understand his thoughts, she saw distress in it. "I will not go to his school, I am determined. I will run away; yes, I am resolved I will. You will help me to go away, Jesse, will you not?"

"I don't know where you could go to," said Jesse; "and Mr. Halton would find you out if you did."

"Not if I were resolved to hide myself," said May, her eyes sparkling with anger. "I would go anywhere, I would live amongst the poorest people in any little cottage; I would go any distance, if I could only escape from going to school. I know it will kill me. I know I shall die there, shut up all day in the house, instead of being out here in the fresh wind. I am determined I won't go. I will find some poor people to hide me in their cottage, and let me live with them."

"You could not; you could not bear it when you tried," said Jesse, shocked at the idea.

"I should not care. I would do it if you would only help me," said May, now fairly crying. "I would rather work with them all day salting herrings, than be in that school. I shall die there; remember I can't even walk out with my foot. I should never get a breath of fresh air there. I shall fall ill directly. It is cruel of you not to help me."

"I would help you all I could," Jesse replied; "but what can I do? Don't cry, dear Miss May, don't."

"Well I know it does no good to cry," answered May, as she wiped her eyes; "but I can't think what to do."

There was a long pause. She was turning over in her mind various schemes of escape. Jesse looked up at the sky, and thought it was time to row homewards, for the wind was not far off. He turned the boat's head towards the shore, and pulled very steadily.

"I don't want to go home," said May.

"Ay, but we must," he replied laconically. "Sit on that side more."

"I'll tell you what," he began, after he had been rowing for some minutes. "I think I

know of a place you might go and hide yourself in, if you are really resolved to go."

"I am resolved, whether you help me or not. Where is it?"

"Well, it is the cottage Grannie was speaking of at Filby."

"Your cottage? But who lives there?"

"Why, you know Betty Burton, the pretty girl who helps the woman as makes your dresses. Her folks live at Filby. She is going to marry a shipmate of mine, that is Sam Burton. He is her cousin. He is there with Will Cousins in Lockwood's lugger,—out there, look,—while he stays on shore. He is going to marry Betty very soon; and I have promised him he shall have the cottage to live in, as it's near Yarmouth, where he will find work; and hard by Filby too where her folks are. If you was to go and live with them, nobody would ever think of looking for you there; and she is a nice, tidy girl, and it would be a comfortable, respectable place for you."

"Jesse, you are so good!" cried May, in rapture. "You always help me when no one

else could. I shall be so comfortable with Betty. I will go. Oh, do go and arrange all about it. Row home quick."

"I am rowing home, but it don't seem as we made any headway," replied Jesse, turning to look at the distant shore. "This is a queer craft; she seems as she could do nothing but drift with the tide. We are as far off as we were a quarter of an hour ago."

"We are in the tideway, are not we?" asked May, meaning by that a strong current setting seawards, which she knew was hard to pull against.

"Yes, we are; and I can't get her to move against it. I would not mind, but I see the wind is coming, and I want to get in. It will blow hard to-night."

"Well, never mind; it is not coming yet," said May, watching the distant foam caps. "You can rest a bit. You look quite hot."

"Yes; I can't hardly stir her against the tide for all my rowing. I never saw such a queer boat. I should think she was built to float on a pond in some gentleman's park; she is not fit for sea. I wonder who brought her down here!"

"Well, if she floated out with the tide, she will float easily in with it," said May cheerily. "Do rest yourself. Don't do any more than just keep her from going out any farther."

"But that's all I've been doing all this time," Jesse answered. "However, the tide will turn soon. I hope the wind won't come with it."

He pulled a few vigorous strokes to recover the distance they had drifted during the last few minutes, and then rested on his oars.

"I'll go to-night, and see Sam, and tell him you will want to be a lodger with his wife, and hear how soon he expects to be married ; but I know the banns are not up yet. They are to be put up at Filby church. Sam or she must go and stay at Filby, I suppose, a bit. Sam is in the lugger now," Jesse added, directing May's attention to a vessel that lay at some distance, black in the decreasing light.

May pleased herself by following out the dark lines of the rigging against the clear expanse of sky that lay between the water and the clouds ; but Jesse took his oars, and began to row again.

"You need not waste time taking me to the

Hermitage now," she said. "Pull ashore at the town, and I can have a fly to go back."

"We are nearer the Hermitage than the town now, we have drifted so far south'ard," said Jesse; "besides, I want to go and pull my own boat up on the shingle, for it will be a rough night."

May looked at him. She had never seen him rowing in that way before. Large drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"Look at the lugger," he answered in reply to her questioning glance. "She is making all ready; they know it is coming on hard."

The distant foam caps were now invisible in the fading light, but May saw the streak of clear sky growing broader, and the clouds overhead hurrying fast along, and she saw Jesse cast an anxious look at the shore, still as far off as ever. "The wind is coming," she said; "shall we get in easily, Jesse?"

"Oh, I would not mind it at all in my own boat," he replied impatiently. "I would run you in before it in ten minutes, but this damned craft won't stir a yard, and if it comes on to blow——look! there it comes."

He was silent. May saw the wind strike the water near the lugger, and saw her careen over under its violence ; in another moment it was blowing the light spray from the waves into her face ; and after a few minutes the water began to feel its influence, the waves grew higher, and though the clumsy boat also felt the wind, and began to move landward, May saw that Jesse was nearly exhausted with his previous efforts, and could take but little advantage of the change in their course. There was cause for alarm, she felt ; and she asked no questions till the dashing of a wave over the side of the boat made her first scream and then laugh.

“Any more of that ?” she asked, shaking the water from her cloak, and wiping her forehead with her cambric handkerchief.

“Ay, plenty more ; it’s lucky we have the pail,” said Jesse. “Sit still where you are ; there is another coming.” And another did come with a vengeance, and threw twenty gallons of water into the boat. Jesse swore a deep oath, and May sprang up in real terror. “Let us bale it out. Where is the pail ?”

"Sit down, you," he cried impatiently, "you'll go over else. Hold fast by that thwart; there's no water to signify."

But splash after splash, the water fell into the boat; and at last Jesse gave May permission to take the pail and bale it out; she did so, working with a strength which she had hardly been conscious of possessing.

The wind increased, and the rain, which had been falling in solitary large drops suddenly poured down in a blinding sheet; while the boat one moment rolled over to her gunwale, and then was deluged by a wave dashing over the side, undoing in an instant all the work of the baling; yet May hardly recognised the danger. "Courage, Jesse," she said cheerfully, as she paused to take breath; "the wind will blow us on shore. It's only having patience."

As she spoke, the boat gave a sudden lurch, and she lost her footing and fell. Jesse's arm caught her, and saved her from going overboard—and the boat again righted, but he had lost his hold of one of the oars and it was gone hopelessly. May saw an expression of dismay on his face, and felt their case was growing des-

perate. He took the pail from her, and began baling. Fortunately for them, but little more water came in ; the wind was so heavy as to press down the waves, and it was only occasionally that one came over the gunwale ; but the boat, while going ahead one moment, turned round the next and drifted broadside.

"We are driving towards the land, are we not?" May asked, in as firm a tone as she could command. "Yes, if we reach it," he answered, in a low voice. May screamed in terror.

"Are we really in danger? Oh, we can't be!" she cried, clinging to him in agony. He put his arm round her, as if to protect her ; and indeed his grasp alone kept her from going overboard, whenever the boat rose suddenly upon the crest of the wave, or rolled over before it. May's arm was clasped round his neck. "Shall we get back?" she asked, this time in a whisper.

"No, dear ; no," he answered sadly. "She will go down the first sea she ships: it can't be long first. Oh, why did I bring you here to kill you?"

"Oh, don't say so, Jesse—don't," she sobbed, hiding her face on his shoulder, "they would have taken me away from you,—they can't now. And now we shall go to mamma. I don't mind."

Jesse's kisses answered hers ; but he turned, and tried to think of some means of saving her yet. He wanted to bind her fast with a cord to the remaining oar, but she begged him not.

"Oh, no ; it's of no use, Jesse. Tie my arm to yours, let us both keep near when we go down."

"Oh, I have you," he answered, clasping her tight. "I won't let you go."

They sat still clasped in each other's arms. The boat was drifting helplessly broadside on over the water ; the darkness hid all from them but the waves close by ; but May thought she heard the sound of the waves rattling on the shingle, and fancied they were nearing the beach.

"Are we near the shore, Jesse ?" she asked, raising her head from where it lay on his shoulder.

"I don't know," he answered ; "but it won't help us if we are."

"I wish you had not tied my arm to yours. Untie me. If you were alone you could swim. Untie my arm."

"If I could save myself, I could you too," Jesse replied, kissing her forehead.

Just then a huge wave lifted the boat, and flung it round; the noise of the water striking the shore grew plainer amidst the roar of the sea.

"Is there any hope, Jesse?" May asked again.

"None at all, dear. She will go to pieces the moment she touches the shingle."

May again dropped her head on his shoulder. She was faint and numb, and was almost unconscious of anything except of his arm tightly clasping her. Suddenly he bent down and kissed her. "Good-bye, darling,—good-bye; it's coming."

May looked up to see a great wave rolling upon them,—foaming white over their heads. Then came a roar of water, and a violent shock, and she was conscious of no more.

CHAPTER VI.

DRIFTING.

MAY waked up with the feeling that an eternity had passed. Some one was rubbing her hands and chafing her temples. It was Jesse, she knew.

"Are we on shore?" she asked faintly. "Where are we? oh! we are safe?" and she burst into a long sobbing fit.

"Yes; all right," said Jesse, as, reassured there could not be much the matter if May chose to cry over it, he rose from his knees, and wrung the water from his blue jersey, and wiped the blood from his knuckles, which were sorely scarred. "Are you hurt at all, dear?" he asked, again kneeling down by her.

"No; not at all. Where is the boat? Did you swim ashore with me?"

"No; nobody could have done that, on the stones out there; that wave carried us right in. I have never seen such a wave

on this coast before : it flung us right upon the sand, and out of the boat. I had hold of you, and I got on my feet, and ran up here as I could ; but I think no other wave has come up near so high, for she lies there, all stove in. Can you get up, dear ? ”

“ Yes. Where are we ? ” said May, rising with his help.

“ Not far from home,—your home I mean. I’ll get you there, and go back and tell them we are safe, or poor Grannie will be thinking we are drowned.”

May could hardly stand against the heavy wind. Jesse carried her up the beach, on to the road where the hedge sheltered them a little ; and as the Hermitage was fortunately not more than a hundred yards off, he soon got her there. Green was sitting in tranquil ignorance of their danger, supposing her young lady was detained at the shop by the rain. “ Merciful Lord ! is she dead ? ” she shrieked, as on opening the door, she saw her darling lifted over the threshold, her face white, and streaked with blood, and the water streaming from her hair and dress.

"No, God be thanked; she is all right," replied Jesse, placing her on the sofa; "but she'll want taking care of." As he spoke, the gardener came in.

"Praise be to God you are safe," he exclaimed as he saw them; "I heard in the town you were on the water. You had better get home, Jesse, quick: Mrs. Freeman is going."

"Oh, Jesse, don't go till you have had some wine," cried May beseechingly; but he was off, and they heard him running fast along the road through the tempest. Green closed the door against the wind, gave May some hot spirits and water, and put her to bed, asking no questions, but intent only on quieting and soothing her. "There; I hope she will do, she has gone to sleep," she said, coming back to the kitchen, where James stood drying his wet clothes; "but I think she has been saved by a miracle, just."

May woke from sleep, comparatively well, but very weak, and in pain, both from her ankle, and many bruises. She could not

have got up even if Green had allowed it. She sent James to Sandmouth to inquire after Jesse; and he brought back word that Mrs. Freeman was dead. May sat up to write a few words of sympathy to Jesse, and lay down again exhausted with this slight effort.

For the next week she did not see Jesse. She heard he was well, but too stiff from his hurts and bruises to leave the house; and she could well believe it, for she herself did not care to move from her bed. She did get up, however, and dressed, and went to the window to look out; she could see, at some distance on the beach, the fragments of the boat, and from time to time two or three Sandmouth fishermen would saunter up and look at the wreck, and talk over it. They would turn and point to the Hermitage, as if they were talking of the wonderful escape she had had. May watched these groups, and wished she could hear what they said of Jesse, and then was glad to lie down on her sofa again.

As the remembrance of that terrible hour of suspense and horror in the boat grew less continually present to her, she recollected the other troubles that had occupied her attention before the tempest rose. She re-read her uncle's letter; and as her indignant spirit writhed under its cold hard words of blame, she grew more determined in her resolution to escape going to a school prison by running away. She wondered whether Jesse in his present grief had remembered his promise to help her, and waited impatiently for an opportunity to speak to him. The idea of school now made her fairly desperate. She would be divided from him, perhaps for years; and as she thought of this, her intention of running off became no longer a mere wild impulse, but a settled resolve that she cherished with the obstinate pertinacity of a child, and pondered over night and day. She knew she would have to live hard in Betty's cottage, but she was prepared for that; and indeed to a girl who had for the last three months spent the best part of every day in an open boat or

on the sea-shore, the rough accommodation of a clean country cottage was far less repelling in prospect than the irksome decorum and confinement of a schoolroom. She did not bestow a second thought on the discomforts of her future place of refuge.

She wanted to see Jesse, and know if he had spoken to Sam; but she had to wait a week. On the morning of Mrs. Freeman's funeral she ordered the fly, and went with Green to be present in the churchyard. She knew the people of Sandmouth would expect this mark of respect from her. They all knew her affection for the old woman, and were all talking of her late adventure in the storm with Jesse; and no one would think it strange that after assisting at the interment, she should, even at the churchyard gate, stop to shake hands with Josiah and with Jesse.

"Come to me to-morrow if you can," she said, hurriedly. "If you can, bring the boat."

Jesse's eyes thanked her; while Josiah said, "Won't you be afraid to go on the water again?"

“Not in any boat he thinks safe,” she answered undauntedly; and she turned away, and got into the fly. Jesse assisted her in, and she whispered, “Come with the boat; it’s the only way to be alone;” and she went home to wait for the morrow.

Jesse did not keep her waiting the next day, and came early to say the boat was at the landing-stage. May limped down there, and took her place in the little craft, not without a slight tremor as the recollection of her recent danger came over her.

“Are you afraid, a little?” Jesse asked with a smile. “This boat is safe, and we will keep close to shore.

“I have seen Sam,” Jesse continued, going at once to business; “and he says he is quite willing you should live with Betty. But, dear, you will have to keep indoors and never let the neighbours see you, else they will talk of you in the village, and your uncle will hear of it. You must let Betty say you are her friend, and are ill.”

“She may say I am blind, or dumb, or anything, if she can keep me safe,” said

May. "I would hide in a cave, Jesse, sooner than go to school. I should never be allowed to write to you. I should never hear of you. If I could not go to Betty, you should take me across to Holland, Jesse."

Jesse smiled, and shook his head ; but he was too wise to say more than, "You would not be so safe anywhere as at Filby. They will never look for you there, and you must be with people you know."

"Then it is settled. And how soon am I to go ? How soon ? for there is no time to be lost," said May with energy.

"Why, but there's no such hurry, is there ? You aren't going to school till after Christmas ; and there is plenty of time. Anyhow, it can't be yet. Sam isn't married yet ; he is going to-morrow to Filby to have the banns put up, and I shall go with him in the lugger ; she has not sailed yet. She lost her bowsprit in the storm. Josh says I must go and take possession of the cottage, for the man there has not paid the rent for some time ; and he says he will go with me to help me to do that, because I know nothing of that sort of thing."

"I dare say you could do it," said May, who had no doubts of Jesse's capacity. "But has he managed to get the money he wanted? I know he wanted it very much, or he would not have asked me to write to my uncle. I wish I had not, but he asked me."

"He ought not to have done that, however much he wanted it," replied Jesse, gravely. "It was wrong of him to make you write; but he is in trouble I think, and to-morrow I shall tell him he is welcome to have half of what poor Grannie left me."

"Give it him all, Jesse. You don't want it. You live in his house you know."

"Yes; but I may as well pay him for my board and lodging as give him all, and let him keep me. He would have to do that unless I went to sea again, or got something to do on shore. I think I might get on one of the Yarmouth colliers that go up and down between there and the Tyne. If you go to Filby I will do so, but you will want money,—or," added Jesse, hastening to dismiss a supposition which he thought might be painful to May's pride, "or at least Betty

will. She can't make you comfortable on Sam's wages."

"That is true." May admitted it.

"But," said Jesse, after a pause, "you do not mean to stop hiding yourself long from your uncle, do you, dear? It would not be right at all. You will send him word why you are gone, and say you will come home at once if he will promise not to send you to school, but let you have a governess again."

May had not made up her mind on that matter. Jesse continued,—

"It would be very wrong in me to help you run away, and hide a long time among poor rough folks like them. You are a lady, and must learn the things a lady knows,—you must, dear. Write to your uncle, and promise to be obedient and come back, if he will send a lady down here to teach you, without sending you to school."

"I suppose I must," said May, unwillingly. "Yes, I will, if you think it right."

"I wish," said Jesse, emboldened by this concession, "I do wish as you would write now, and ask him if he could not send a lady here

now, and promise to be very good, and do all she tells you."

"Oh, nonsense, Jesse. I know he would not, he is so unkind; he would only send me to school directly—before Christmas even. No; I will get quite safe away before I write. Oh, Jesse, you promised you would help me, and now you are going against me too. Oh, don't you go against me!"

"You know I wouldn't," he said, a little reproachfully. "I will do anything you want. I'm not against you. I only wish as you would try and get him to give you a governess again, before you think of running away, it would be much more like a lady."

"I don't want to be a lady," said May. "I want to live among people I love. I don't want you to leave me,—ever," she said impulsively, and holding out both her hands to him. It was a child's action, but there was a woman's devoted love in her eyes that told him what the action meant. Jesse caught the oars both in his left hand, and with the right met the offered clasp.

"God bless you, dear!" he said, when he

could speak ; "but you must not promise now. You are too young. It is not right to let you."

"I am not too young," said May. "I know what I promise; and I say it now, because then when they try to make me forget you, I can say I have promised to marry you, and I can't break my word. Shall it not be so?" she asked, looking brightly and trustfully into his eyes. Another clasp of the hand was the only answer, for all this time they were close to shore, and under the eyes probably of the gardener who was collecting seaweed to burn; and any other token of plighted faith was impossible.

After a long interval of conversation too incoherent to be remembered afterwards, May returned to the subject of the governess. "If he will send her—I wish he would let me and her go and live at Rawlstone, in the village I mean. There must be little houses that would do for us till I can have my own; and I should get to know all the people there, and you could come over whenever you are at Yarmouth or at Filby."

"Yes; I could come every fortnight or so,"

he answered, entering into her castle building as fully as she did. "But dear Miss May,—no, May, my darling, I mean,—do think about learning what the governess will teach you. Let her teach you to be a lady,—do."

"Then, Jesse, you must learn to be a gentleman, that's all."

But he blushed painfully, and stammered, "Oh, no, no, dear; you know that can't be ever. It's no use talking."

"Oh, Jesse, dear, I don't mean to grieve you," cried May, much distressed. "I don't want you different from what you are; but, indeed, you could be a gentleman, I'm sure, if I am ever to be a lady. You are ever so much cleverer than me, and any one would call you a gentleman if you were dressed as one."

Jesse demurred: "No, they would not; there's lots of things a gentleman does as is different, I know. I know one the minute I see him, and not by his dress. It's no use your trying to make me a gentleman, dear."

"Well, then I'm sure I don't care if I can't. I can't love you better than I do," she replied. "Only I don't care about becoming a lady

if it is to make any difference between us, that's all. Now put me ashore, Jesse. It is growing cold, and I did not think it was so late. There is Green looking for me. So you sail in the lugger to-night. I shall think of you in the morning when you'll be at Yarmouth."

The next morning May saw from her window that the lugger was gone, and rejoiced that the wind was soft, as Jesse and Josiah were on board. She looked a long time at the sea and sky, and then sat down to some needle-work,—the only occupation she liked or would ever attend to,—and reflected on Jesse's wish that she should write to Mr. Halton, and beg him to let her have another governess. She had said she would not write, but now that Jesse was away and on the sea, his wishes were law to her, and she resolved to follow his advice, and see what would come of it. She sat down, and wrote a long letter to her uncle, entreating him in the most earnest manner not to send her to school, where she must be unhappy, but to try her with a governess again. She dilated much on her lameness, which prevented her taking walking exercise, and ren-

dered the boat necessary to her health ; and she promised that she would show perfect obedience to any governess he chose for her ; though while she wrote this she mentally reserved to herself the right of keeping up a constant intercourse with Jesse, whether the governess approved it or no. She was unused to the begging mood ; but she entreated and besought with all her power, and she thought it would be impossible for her uncle to refuse her request. While she was writing this letter, Jesse on board the lugger, with Josiah, was preparing the details of their proposed plan. He was telling his brother how he intended to let his friend Sam live in the cottage at Filby as long as he pleased. Mr. Freeman was vexed that the few shillings of weekly rent should thus be lost ; but as he saw Jesse was obstinate, he let the matter drop ; for he was intent on persuading him to lend him the two hundred pounds his grandmother had left him in gold.

Josiah Freeman, having wooed Dame Fortune with more energy than prudence, on the principle that faint heart never won fair lady,

was now in serious difficulties. He had been tempted by an apparently low price to buy the Hermitage, when he ought to have kept his earnings in his own hands against a rainy day ; and now the rainy day had come, he knew not where to turn. He had borrowed money to conclude his bargain, and had had to borrow again to repair the roof. His new corn and coal business did not succeed ; he was heavily in debt for the stores he had laid in, and he had been looking forward to the little legacy from his grandmother as a means of keeping his creditors in good humour until he could tide over the evil day. But the legacy proved smaller than he expected, and Mrs. Freeman left it to Jesse, whom she thought had been unfairly dealt with by Josiah in the matter of the small property their father had left. This might be justice, but it was very inconvenient to Josiah who was at his wits' end to know what to do. But he only told Jesse that he was in great distress for ready money, and he only told him this when they stood on the deck of the lugger, as sailing before a fresh breeze, she was entering Yarmouth Roads. The free-

hearted sailor immediately offered him three-fourths of his legacy as a loan. "You should have it all," he added, "only then I should be a burden on you for my board and lodging, and I want some ready money myself."

"You are a noble fellow, Jesse," said Josiah; "you are very good to me."

"Well, you brought me up, and I would like to do more for you if I could."

"Ah, if you were a rich man, lad——"

"Then I would see you fairly started again, and with no makeshift business like this," said Jesse laughing. But Mr. Freeman had resolved it should not be his fault if his brother were not some day a wealthy man.

"You will never be rich, lad, not if being bailiff at Rawlstone is to be your first step up. You might be at Rawlstone, and master of it too if you liked. Don't you know you could?" Jesse's blush told Josiah things were better than he had hoped.

"If you were to ask her to marry you, do you think she would?" he continued.

"Ay! but it is not honourable to ask her while she is so young," said Jesse.

Josiah had in the course of business pretty well rubbed his notions of honour smooth from any inconvenient angles, but still he had not been born deficient in that quality, and this was of service to him by enabling him to understand his brother's scruples, and teaching him how to overcome them.

"It might not seem honourable if things were different," he said; "but if she goes to a great school with other young ladies, they will laugh her out of her liking for a sailor lad, and your chance will be gone. She will never look at you again if she once goes to school."

"She won't go to school, that is settled," said Jesse, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and walking away; he was very angry with Josiah, he had just been prepared to tell him of the plan he and May had arranged relative to Sam and Betty; but he could not bring himself to go on talking now, his very love was insulted by Josiah's mercenary calculations, and in a vague dim way he recognised that he was himself en-

trusted with the safe keeping of the self-willed girl, from the very power his affection gave him over her. The poor uneducated sailor could not have explained his feelings to Josiah, or even to himself; but he felt this nevertheless, and his brother's words jarred on him. He went forward to assist his friends in lowering the anchor, and did not come within reach of Mr. Freeman's tongue as long as he could avoid him on any pretext.

But after they landed and were walking through the lanes towards Filby, Sam lingered behind to chat with a passer-by, and Jesse saw he must use the opportunity to speak to Josiah.

"Josh, Miss May says she won't go to school, she will rather hide herself somewhere in the country where her uncle can't find her till he promises to let her remain at home; and she says I must help her." And he briefly told all the plan he and May had arranged. Josiah's astonishment kept him silent at first,—

"Run away and hide herself, and you

help her!" he gasped, when he could speak. "What a fool the girl is, and you too. She shall do no such thing. I'll stop her myself. What would Mr. Halton say?"

"Well; he won't know where she is till she chooses to write," said Jesse, simply. "She will write and tell him she will come back if he will promise not to send her to school. She will be only a week or two with Betty, I dare say. I can't help it, Josh. I've tried to get her to stay at home, but it's no use, she will go."

"She can't get away unless you help her, lame as she is," said Mr. Freeman; but his active mind was already considering whether this intended freak of May's could not be turned to profit. If it could not, why, it should not be allowed to take place to irritate Mr. Halton, and bring discredit on the family; but was it not possible that this childish prank might end in securing her for Jesse's wife? Mr. Freeman saw a possibility so unlooked for, a prospect so magnificent, opening before him for his brother, and, as a consequence, for himself, that he

stopped in his walk to consider the chances. Jesse walked on whistling "Hearts of Oak," and that gave Josiah time to collect his thoughts. He was not long in deciding that Jesse should secure the prize, and not longer in settling how best to drive him into this breach of trust. He soon overtook his brother, and commenced the manœuvre; but his first step was apparently to oppose the scheme for May's escape.

"Well, you blamed me for not being honourable just now," he began, in a tone of severe indignation; "but all I can say, is, if you encourage Miss Cressingham in such a prank as this, as will ruin her good name for ever, I shall feel it my duty to send word to her uncle, and let him know what you are doing."

Jesse, who had flushed scarlet as Josiah's meaning dawned upon him, cut him short. "I can take care of that as well as he can, I suppose. I know what is a fit place for my promised wife to live in. Of course I'm not going to stay there, I'm not such a fool; but a hiding-place from him she shall have, poor girl, and a safe one."

"Do you mean she has promised to be your wife?" asked Mr. Freeman, hardly able to credit his ears.

"Yes; she has. She'll be my wife when she is her own mistress, and can do as she pleases; and I shall take care she is in a respectable lodging, if she will run away from her uncle," replied Jesse, indignantly, conscious of his right to protect May. Josiah felt as if Heaven were raining plums in his mouth. The train was laid, and he had but to fire it. He proceeded to drive Jesse to extremity.

"Well; I tell you I shall feel it my duty to prevent her leaving the Hermitage, unless you make it all ready to be married directly you come here."

It was Jesse's turn to look astonished. "Married!" he faltered.

"Ay, married," Josiah replied; "and the very day you come here. Sam and Betty are to be married in three weeks, and I suppose you can be, too; the banns can be put up for you in the same church, as you are an inhabitant of this parish now, and then you can take your wife where you will."

There was silence for some moments ; and then Mr. Freeman added : " This cottage is yours now, so you belong already to this parish and can have the banns put up here ; and when she is your wife, her uncle can't take her from you."

Jessie mused a long time on this, but at last replied, " I can't settle to it, Josh. I can't speak to her of it. I must think about it."

" Oh ! think, by all means," said Mr. Freeman ; " but if you don't make up your mind to marry her now when you can, I am afraid you will never see her again ; for if she once goes to a fine school, she will learn to despise a sailor lad whose brother keeps a little shop in a village. A girl is but a girl ; and though I don't say but what she will fret about you at first, yet in time she will learn to think like her schoolfellows, and forget you. You will never see her again if she goes to that school."

Jesse made no reply, but walked on in a perplexing reverie, till they came in sight of the cottage. It was in a lane about three miles from Yarmouth, and two from Filby,

in which parish it stood ; there was only one other house near it, and that was about a hundred yards off, near a pond. The cottage was out of repair, the tenant had vacated it suddenly on finding himself called on for the rent, and left it in an indescribably dirty state. "There is a deal to be done here before it can be fit for her to come to," said Josiah, as Jesse looked round in disgust. "However, I will see what can be done. You look about and find out where the damage is, while I go with Sam to Filby to see his folks, and have his banns put up."

Josiah called Sam and set off with him, and, as soon as they were out of hearing of Jesse, said, "I have been hearing from Jesse how he means to bring Miss Cressingham here to stay with your wife. I wonder you should have agreed to such a thing, and she a lady ; I should have thought Betty had had more sense of what was right."

Sam, much bewildered, stopped, rebuked by Mr. Freeman's tone of moral indignation ; and Josiah continued, "I feel that I am responsible if I let the poor girl go away

with him, unless they can be married as soon as they come here."

"Is the young lady sweet upon him?" asked Sam, in open-mouthed amazement.

"Is she sweet upon him?" replied Mr. Freeman, contemptuously. "You sailors are all fools alike, I believe. Do you suppose she would run away from her uncle who has always been good to her, and live in a cottage like that, unless she was fond of Jesse? But I won't let her come. I won't let her leave Sandmouth unless you promise that you will see them married in the church at the same time you and Betty are married."

Sam, utterly confounded at this new view of the case, shocked at his own stupidity, and much overawed by Mr. Freeman, promised his aid as he could best give it, and even suggested that the banns might be put up when his own were, and then there could be no difficulty in Jesse and May being married the same day as himself and Betty. Mr. Freeman listened with great attention to this suggestion, affected to consider it seri-

ously, and finally gave it his cordial approval.

At the village of Filby Sam found his uncle, Betty's father, and a troop of relations; and Josiah had some difficulty in persuading him to come alone with him to find the parish clerk. He got rid, however, of all assistants, saw the clerk alone with Sam, and arranged that the banns should be put up for his brother and May at the same time as his were.

It seemed rather a dangerous proceeding to allow the daughter of Churchill Cressingham to be publicly asked in Filby Church, not more than ten miles distant from Rawlstone; but in fact the danger of discovery was very slight. There was very little communication between Filby and the villages in the next county, and on the other side of Yarmouth; and the name of Cressingham was not very uncommon among the farmers, as there had in former times been a village bearing it in the vicinity. The parish clerk made no comment when he heard it, and wrote down Margaret Cressingham, of Sand-

mouth, in Lincolnshire, with as much indifference as he had done Betty's name a moment before. If he had no suspicion, Josiah was convinced no one else would have, for his pronunciation of all names was so imperfect that none could be distinguished; and moreover, he found that the church, being a mile away from the village, seldom numbered a large congregation, the majority of the inhabitants patronising the dissenting chapel in Filby itself. If Sam only kept his counsel Josiah saw all would be safe.

"Don't you say a word to Jesse, or there will be a devil of a row because we have done it without asking him," he said, as they returned to the cottage in the lane. "If they don't choose to take advantage of it, and she goes sensibly to school, as her uncle wishes her, then there's no harm done; but if she is mad enough to come here with him, I trust to you to see them married fast and properly here. And mind you don't let Jesse go over to Filby while he is here putting the cottage to rights, or may be he will hear of the banns being up, and make a fuss. I

would take him back to Sandmouth to-morrow, but I suppose he must stop here a day or two, or he would not be an inhabitant of this parish, and I think that's the law. There is a public-house we passed between here and Yarmouth, at the cross-roads, and we will sleep there to-night."

They found Jesse talking with the women of the neighbouring cottage,—an old woman and her daughter-in-law. .

"I have asked Mrs. Tebb to come and clean up the rooms to-morrow," he said. "And what is to be done about furniture? I never thought of that."

"Of course you did not," said his brother. "Let you alone for never thinking of anything. But I will manage it; there's a man here in Yarmouth, a furniture broker, owes me a debt, and he will never pay it, so I will go over and take it out in chairs and tables; and I have at home a lot of pieces of carpet and blankets and such things which are old stock, and will do very well here."

"I can't pay you for them at present," said Jesse.

“Do you think I want you to, when you have lent me all that money? They are last year’s goods, and I’ll give you them willingly, if it gives you pleasure to put them here for Sam. You are a good lad, and I wish I could give you a return for your kindness. I suppose you and Sam can whitewash and paper the place, if I get you the things.”

“Of course,” said Sam. “I can if he can’t; and we will mend the roof where the rain comes in. I dare say we can get some nails and wood at the Cross Roads.”

To the Cross Roads they went for the night, and the next morning Mr. Freeman procured some lime and brushes from some builder’s men who were at the tavern, and set the two young sailors, who considered the thing a capital joke, to whitewash the cottage, to the no small discomfort of Mrs. Tebb, who was cleaning the rooms. He then went to Yarmouth, and there saw one of his creditors, a coal merchant, whom he satisfied by paying a portion of his debt, and then found the dealer in tables and

chairs, and offered to accept payment of him in kind. Before evening he returned in a cart, containing an assortment of cottage furniture and kitchen ware, to the cottage, where he found everything very clean and white, and smelling very damp. They carried in the furniture, gave the key of the house door to Mrs. Tebb, and went out ; but not as before to the Cross Roads, but to Yarmouth, where Josiah wished to pass Sunday, and where Jesse and Sam found their ship-mates loitering.

Among his friends Jesse forgot for a while his brother's opposition to his plans, and his insolent proposition in regard to Miss Cressingham ; but when they returned to Sandmouth, Josiah went up into the attic to look for the curtain-stuffs and carpetings, and said to his brother,—

“ Had you not better go and tell her what I said ? ” and all Jesse's anger blazed out again. But in vain he swore it was all cursed nonsense, and Josh was a damned fool ; Josiah was inflexible, and vowed that he would send word to Mr. Halton if May did

not promise him she would go to church with Jesse directly they got to Yarmouth.

Jesse was furious ; he would not go to the Hermitage for three days, and then he went in a strangely excited, irritable state of mind. May saw something was wrong, and spared no pains, no flatteries, to make him good-tempered. She could not succeed, however, for the more amiable and coaxing she was, the greater became the struggle in the poor fellow's mind as to what he should do. He knew but little of the world, and nothing of the law ; but he had an instinctive sense that to persuade her to give herself and her property to him while she was so childishly ignorant, was a dishonourable action. How utterly dishonourable, he could hardly be expected to realize. He knew he loved her heartily and disinterestedly, and that she loved him ; and he thought she would be much happier with him than at the school where her uncle would send her. Still for a few days longer he kept his distress to himself, and said nothing of his perplexity to her.

One morning she met him with a smile of conscious deserving, and told him she had followed his advice, and written to Mr. Halton to beg him to let her have a governess at Sandmouth. Jesse drew his breath freely again, and felt much relieved.

"Are you pleased?" she asked, looking up as desirous of praise as a child is when it knows it has acted rightly.

"Me pleased? Of course I am, dear, very pleased," he replied; and he went back rejoicing to his brother, and told him May was not going to run away now. Josiah hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. It would have been a very good stroke of business to have married his brother to Miss Cressingham; but while Jesse was so blind to his own good, it could not be done; and if May were left at Sandmouth with a governess, there was not much danger she would forget him. So he professed himself very pleased that the young lady had returned to common sense, and sent Jesse over again to Yarmouth in the lugger to pay a visit to the cottage, and take steps to fit it for Sam and Betty's occupation.

Jesse took little interest in the cottage now, since May was no longer coming to it; but he told Mrs. Tebb to light fires there, and asked Sam to put a cheap paper on the walls, and plant some cabbages in the garden. That done, he went to Yarmouth, and made inquiries touching the colliers.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FORGERY.

As Mr. Halton delayed answering his niece's letter for a fortnight, May looked upon it as certain he meant to grant her request ; but when he wrote, it was to say he could not and would not alter his plans. He wished her to tell the servants he should not need their services longer, and said he should come and take her to London by the middle of the next month.

May almost screamed with dismay and anger as she read this letter. She was quite insensible to the honour of going to her aunt's house for three or four weeks before going to school ; she merely saw in this a hopeless separation from Jesse ; and when she met him, she was in the wildest distress.

"There is no help for it. You must take me to Betty ; you promised you would. You cannot forget your promise," she said anxi-

ously, as she saw the look of perplexity and annoyance with which he read the letter.

"No, dear, no; not if you wish it," he answered. He had not the heart to say otherwise. He dreaded he should lose her for ever if she were sent to London. He was only glad she had no suspicion of his brother's insolent proposal. He did his best to soothe her, and promised to go and find some means for taking her away; reminding her, however, of her own promise, that as soon as she was safe in her hiding-place she would write to her uncle, and offer to return on condition of not being removed from Sandmouth. May answered she would do this, and Jesse returned to his brother while she went to tell Green and James the astonishing news that they would have to leave the Hermitage before Christmas.

But while Jesse had been talking with May, a thunderbolt had fallen on Mr. Freeman, who, on opening his letters, had learned that his chief creditor, the corn factor at Enderby, would wait no longer, and would put an ex-

ecution in his house in five days if he did not pay him the debts long due to him. He demanded a hundred and sixty pounds at once. Josiah had been trying to borrow it, and had tried vainly,—his credit was gone. His neighbours could not or would not help him, and he saw he was a ruined man. He sat looking round vacantly at the familiar room, with all his household gods around him, thinking how long he had worked and how hard, and how he had denied himself, and saved, to come at last to this. He was roused by his brother's coming in hurriedly, and shutting the door fast, as one who had a secret of which to disburden himself.

"It's all wrong again, Josh. Mr. Halton says she shall go to school, and he will come and fetch her himself, and she says she won't go."

"What, she means to run off," cried Josiah, springing up, as a sudden gleam of hope flashed upon him. If May were still bent on that mad freak, he might make his brother master of her and her money before another week was out, and for that week he could

perhaps keep off his fate. He trembled all over with excitement as he asked,—

“And how soon does she mean to go?”

“As soon as she can; but she must wait till Betty is married, and that can't be until Tuesday. They won't have been asked in church three times till Sunday is past.”

“You come and help me get the goods to furnish the cottage,” said Josiah, hurrying towards his storeroom. “Or you go and fetch Betty here; she must make a gown like her own for Miss May. I can't trust my wife with the secret.”

When Betty came, Mr. Freeman gave her a plain stuff dress to make up for May, and told her to take whatever she wanted out of the shop, and trim a bonnet for her also.

“And mind no one sees you doing the work,” he added. And look, here is for you, I've put stuff for curtains and tablecloths in this bale, and here is the carpeting. You can make the cottage look like a little palace. Miss Cressingham will help you to work, but she can't come to you till you are married, you know.”

"I am afraid," said Jesse, when Betty had left them, "that I'll have to take May over to Yarmouth the same time as Betty; that is, if it is to be in the lugger; she sails on Monday."

"And when she reaches Yarmouth, where will Betty go?" asked Josiah, quickly.

"Oh! she can go to Sam's cousin in Yarmouth; she is a decent sort of woman, and will take her to Filby in time to get to the church."

"Very good," said Mr. Freeman. "Well, then, now I'll tell you something. I felt certain all along that somehow or other Miss Cressingham would make you take her to Filby, and nothing would stop her; so when Sam told them to put his banns up, I just had them put up for you and her, and there is nothing to prevent your being married right off when you get to Filby."

"Josiah!"

Jesse uttered the exclamation so indignantly, that Mr. Freeman felt obliged to defend his own conduct.

"You think I had no business to do it;

but I was not going to see the poor girl made a talk of everywhere. I know you mean no harm, lad, but I feel it my duty to take care of her; and if you had settled not to go, there would have been no harm done by the banns being put up; but, as it is, you ought to be married the minute you set foot in Filby, and I shan't let you go unless you promise, and she too, that she will go to church with Betty and Sam. If you won't promise, I will write to Mr. Halton this night. Now you go and tell her this, or I must."

"Must! Who must?" asked a fresh young voice; and May came in, causing them almost as much bewilderment as if she had risen through the floor.

"You are surprised to see me," she said to Jesse. "You did not think I could get here without your help; but I had something so strange to tell you, that when Sam came to speak to me about Betty, I made him get out the boat and row me down here."

"And what has happened?" asked Josiah,

for Jesse seemed unable to make up his mind to speak.

“Why, this : that it will be no trouble at all for me to get away on Sunday, for Green is going away for a week. You know Green and James are to be married. Why do you start so, Jesse? You knew that before; did not you? But now as uncle is sending them away, they want to be married quickly, and she wants to go and see his father and mother first; so she has asked me to let her and him go for a week, and she will send her niece Fanny to take care of me and old deaf Matthew; you know they are the two stupidest people in Sandmouth, and will believe any excuse I please. So I can come away easily. And now, what have you arranged about my going?”

“You can go in Mr. Lockwood’s ship, Miss May; she sails on Monday morning,” said Mr. Freeman; and, having said this, he left the room, giving Jesse a look, which told him he must bring the question to a decision now.

“Well, Jesse, what more? Why, Jesse,

what is the matter?" asked May, studying his face earnestly. "What's wrong?"

Jesse bit his lip, took a turn up and down the room, and at last stopped in front of her. She saw he had grown very pale.

"My dear; he says it is not right for you to go—unless—unless you were to be married to me now; and that, you know ought not to be."

"No, not yet," said May, with a bright smile.

Jesse made no rejoinder, but grew paler still. After a moment, he said,—

"Josh says it won't be right for you to go unless we are married."

"Why not? I don't see any harm," said May, wonderingly. "I am going with Betty and Sam, not with you," she added, blushing.

"He says you shall not go,—unless you are my wife"—replied Jesse. "He says it would be wrong."

"But do you think so, Jesse?" asked May, looking up earnestly in his face. "Do you?"

No; I don't," he answered almost fiercely. "But Josh says if you won't be married to me he will stop your going, and write to Mr. Halton."

"He is a wretch!" cried May; and if Mr. Freeman were listening at the door, he enjoyed the listener's privilege of hearing no good of himself for the next two minutes. Jesse stood irresolute, feeling he ought not to urge her to accept the marriage, and yet longing passionately that she should. May exhausted herself in indignation against Josiah.

"He is a cheat and a coward! He should have said I should not go before—he should. Now what can we do? We can't be married all at once to please him."

"He says he has had the banns put up in Filby church, and everything made ready, and you could be married to me as soon as we got there," said Jesse, slowly and unwillingly. "I did not know it, May; it's as strange to me as to you," he added, earnestly.

May was silent, utterly confounded by this intelligence. Jesse anxiously tried to assure

her he was innocent of this insolence of putting up the banns.

"Oh! I know you did not do it," she said, impatiently; and again she was silent, thinking of the cruel separation that was threatening them.

Jesse turned half-away, afraid to say a word, lest he should be unfairly influencing her, and yet hoping she would give him the power of keeping her at Sandmouth. If she went away from him now, he felt Josiah was right, and he should never see her again.

At last, May said, with the straightforward directness of a child,—

"Jesse, if I were married to you, Uncle could not send me to school,—could he? He could not take me from you?"

"No, that he could not; no one could take you from me," he answered, every pulse thrilling with the hope of being able to protect her. "No; I might bring you back here, and no one could touch you,—no one."

"Well, then, we will have it so," said May, simply. "You shall take me to the church,

and I'll marry you, Jesse ; and then," she added, putting her hand on his arm and trying to make him turn round to look at her, "you can take care of me always ; can't you ?"

The passionate embrace with which he answered the question almost frightened her.

"I thought you loved me, but I did not think you would give in to that," he said, kissing her again and again. "Bless you, dear ; you will find I'll love you as well as any gentleman of them all would."

"But how are you to take me away on Monday?" asked May, who was more intent on the chance of getting away from her uncle, than on any dreams of future happiness.

"Why, in the lugger, when Betty goes ; she sails on Monday, and gets there on Tuesday morning. I'll come for you in the boat and take you aboard."

Mr. Freeman now judged it best to join the conversation, and so came in. May received him with marked coldness, but told him her decision.

"And then shall we come back here again?" she asked, "since my uncle cannot take me to school when I am married to Jesse."

"No, you had better not," said Mr. Freeman; "it would make a great talk in the town. You had better go to the cottage, Jesse, and tell Sam you will pay for any lodging he likes to take in Yarmouth for the present."

"Yes, that is it," said Jesse. "Do you think, dear, you could live in the cottage?"

"Why, I was going to live there, anyhow," said May. "Of course I can; but I shan't need to be hidden there now, as they can't take me from you. Now come and row me home, please," and she added in a whisper as he followed her towards the door, "I don't choose to talk to Josiah about it. He has behaved very ill, and has obliged me to marry you all in this hurry by his interference."

"But you don't mind?" asked her lover, anxiously.

"No, I don't. I think I'm glad. I shall

then be free from Uncle ; but still, Josiah has no right to do as he has, and I won't stay to talk before him."

Mr. Freeman had no wish that she should. He was only too glad they were going, that he might be alone to think over the desperate state of his affairs. It was still as necessary as ever to find the hundred and sixty pounds before Monday, or his furniture would be seized and his credit hopelessly gone ; and with that public announcement of his insolvency, all his other creditors would be upon him and make him bankrupt at once, while May's flight with Jesse would also be stopped, for even she would not be mad enough to marry him while his brother's house was in possession of bailiffs. If his chief creditor would but have waited one more week, Josiah thought it would be possible to borrow money when he could whisper the secret that Jesse was married to the niece of Mr. Halton ; but to breathe a hint of this now would endanger the success of the plot, and moreover no one would credit such an apparently monstrous supposition. He sat racking his brain to

find a means of rescue, where rescue was none, when May came back into the store-room, saying,—

“Would it be a good plan to tell Fanny Green who will be with me on Monday, that I am going to London to my uncle? or else I shall be missed, and everybody will be talking about it.”

“Yes, if you like,” said Mr. Freeman, with difficulty turning his attention to the question. “She is very stupid, and would believe anything you told her.”

“Oh, if she did not, you know Jesse could write a letter for my uncle, and nobody could tell it was not his; could you not, Jesse?” she said, with pardonable pride in her scholar. “There, look at this letter, Josiah, you cannot say who wrote it, my uncle or Jesse; could you?”

“It is really wonderful,” said Mr. Freeman; and a very dangerous thought occurred to him as to whether this singular resemblance of handwriting might not be used to postpone his ruin for a few weeks, and give him time to recover. Could a letter be written for Mr.

Halton, promising to assist him, and this be shown as a sop to his creditors? or could he borrow money on the strength of it? or—May and Jesse went downstairs, and Josiah was left alone to his temptation.

He did not struggle long; he was grown desperate, and callous to any consideration but the fear of punishment, or he could not have taken advantage as he had of May's ignorance and Jesse's weakness. Now he only weighed, and pondered on, the chance of punishment, and saw he should be sheltered behind his brother.

"It's all safe," he said, as he finished his calculations. "Jesse will be safe. Mr. Halton can't let the thing be made public when he is her husband; and he cannot prove anything against me unless he first convicts him, and that he won't do. He will only be glad to hush it all up for his own name's sake. There's no danger for Jesse. Mr. Halton will be angry enough at first, but he will see he knows nothing about it, and is as stupid as a baby; so he can't quarrel with him long, and he cannot keep him out of her money

in the end, even if it does not become his own as soon as they are married. I wonder how that will be. I am almost afraid it is in Mr. Halton's hands till she is of age, or some of it, at least. But I think Jesse will have some of it directly; anyhow Mr. Halton cannot let them starve, and he must forgive the forgery for her sake and his own. That is certain, and Jesse will be as safe as any one."

And Mr. Freeman went out to walk and arrange his ideas, and buy various kinds of paper at the post-office, and was found busily writing by his brother when he came in a few hours later. Josiah looked narrowly at him, and saw the flush of joy on his face, as he whistled softly his favourite air of Black-Eyed Susan while walking up and down the room, unconscious of all but his own dreams of the future.

"Is your business trouble getting over, Josh?" he asked, as disturbed in his reverie by a noise Mr. Freeman made purposely by pushing back a chair, he noticed at length his brother's occupation.

"Oh, I'll get through, thanks to your loan; but I am very busy," said Josiah. "I have been about your business when I ought to have been writing. I shall not get done this side midnight."

"Can I help you?" asked Jesse. "I can copy anything for you, though I can't add up figures."

"Thank you very much, you could copy that;" and Mr. Freeman handed over the table a long list of the fixtures and furniture in the Hermitage, and then a letter from Mr. Halton relating to the same. Jesse wrote quickly, but Josiah saw that the imitation of Mr. Halton's handwriting was perfect, and the signature of his name seemed a lithographic copy of the original. He noticed also several mistakes in the letter, proving that Jesse's thoughts were far away. This was as he had hoped, and he did not point out the errors, but quietly placed three or four envelopes on the table, telling him to direct them to different people whose addresses he read out. "And now write here," he said, placing another paper before

his brother, and holding it carefully down on the table. "Write 'Accepted,' and underneath, 'John Halton.'"

"What, across the writing?" asked Jesse.

"Yes, across it; it's the copy of a receipt," said Mr. Freeman, promptly. "Now write 'John Halton,'—write it fair, Jesse."

This was the critical moment. If Jesse had had his wits about him, he might have asked why he was to write so singular a copy; or he might in his ignorance of the forms of business mar the appearance of the bill; but Josiah had provided himself with two or three forms of the same bill for one hundred and sixty pounds, payable at six months' date, from the previous Wednesday, and, if one was spoilt, would have made him write a second. No untoward accident happened, however; Jesse wrote the words dictated to him without a further thought, and Mr. Freeman, removing the precious document, placed an invoice before him, and requested a copy of that. It was an hour before he released him; and meantime he brought some supper, and kept his glass

supplied with strong spirit and water, and had the satisfaction of seeing his head was a little confused.

"No, no more, Josh; your grog is too good, and I can't stand it. I feel I have had too much already. Good-night."

"I've done it and got it," said Mr. Freeman as he watched him out of the room. "Who would have thought he would be such a baby? but it's for his good as much as mine. Now I must get him safely married to her on Tuesday, and he is safe, and he will live to thank me yet."

Mr. Freeman deliberated a long time as to the wisdom of trusting the runaways entirely to themselves, or of going with them and seeing them fast married. He was unwilling to mix himself up in the matter, lest the honest people of Sandmouth should hear it and judge him according to their simple sense of right and wrong; but he felt that since he had made his brother guilty of forgery in the security that the marriage with Miss Cressingham would shelter him, he had best go with him and see the

marriage regularly celebrated. After long consideration he decided not to accompany him in the lugger as if accessory to carrying off Miss Cressingham, but to go by land to Yarmouth and meet them there as if by accident, and take them to the church ; which had a more virtuous look when the story came to be known, and might, when told in Sandmouth and Enderby, exonerate him from any suspicion of having helped his brother to wile away the young girl, although Mr. Halton might discover his agency in the deed.

In pursuance of this plan he let Jesse make all the arrangements, and himself went to Enderby and paid his creditor with the forged bill, and came home to take advantage of the respite in trying to sell the Hermitage. He looked so cheerful on Saturday night that his wife hoped his troubles were all at an end.

But if Sunday seemed a long day to the lovers, it was one of torturing anxiety to Josiah, who began to realize as he saw his brother's young handsome face beaming with

love and pleasure, that he had made him an unconvicted felon, and that if any accident prevented his marriage with Mr. Halton's niece, he must become an exile from his native country for life. It was a miserable thought, he tried to drive it away, but it would return and stay by him till the sound of Jesse's whistling was a perfect agony to him. He was glad when the night came, and still more when Monday morning dawned.

May congratulated herself during Sunday, as she found her new servants even more stupid and less likely to give her trouble than she had expected. Fanny was suffering so much from toothache that she could not attend to her work, and old Matthews was too deaf to hear anything but the shortest words shouted in his ear. May told Fanny that she was going away, and that she would go on Monday afternoon to Enderby to meet her uncle there, and he would take her to London. It cost her an effort to tell this falsehood, but having made up her mind to do it, she did it completely and effectually.

ally. The announcement caused Fanny no surprise. She was accustomed to go to Enderby herself to visit her friends, and she did not recognise any impropriety in the young lady going there alone to meet her uncle. May packed up her wardrobe and favourite books, but told Fanny she would take all she needed for a few days in a small portmanteau, and the large trunks would have to be sent after her to London. Fanny was quite indifferent to the matter, but she remembered what her mistress told her, afterwards, as May meant that she should.

On Sunday evening Jesse came, bringing a parcel which he said was needlework done by Betty for May, and a light bonnet-box which he took into the parlour. May sent Fanny to look for something at the top of the house, and then turned to welcome him.

“It is all settled; the lugger sails to-morrow afternoon at five, and I will be here with Betty at half-past three, and we will row out to sea. You are to wear this dress, it is like Betty’s, and she will say you are her sister going to see her married. Sam is on the lugger, and when

I've rowed you alongside, he will remember to ask me to come on board to go and see his wedding. Mind you don't laugh. Here is your dress, dear, in this parcel."

"Don't you dislike 'carrying out parcels for the shop'?" said May, archly.

"I never minded carrying anything for you; and this is yours, and there are stout boots, too, with the dress."

"Cannot I even wear my own boots?" asked May, untying the string rather unwillingly.

"Josiah says you can't; he has sent you some like what Betty wears, and a shawl, and a veil to hide your face. The bonnet is in this box. You must put on the dress and come down to the landing-place at half-past three, and then I can step and fetch down your bundle or basket, and you must put on the bonnet and shawl when you are in the boat. Now I must go, dear, Fanny is coming. Good-bye."

He clasped her hand tightly; but Fanny's footsteps were heard approaching, and he left the house quickly, while May took her parcel upstairs to examine its contents. They were

a woollen dress of a dark hue, a bright shawl, warm woollen gloves, and stout boots. The bonnet was trimmed even prettily, so that it might seem to belong to a young girl conscious of her own fresh cheeks, but a thick brown veil was provided to hide the face under it. May wondered if all these precautions were necessary, for coarse stockings and a pocket handkerchief of very common material had been placed with the boots and gloves. She tried on the dress, and was not at all pleased with the effect of the resplendent shawl upon it. She did not waste much time, however, before the glass, but went to bed and fell fast asleep to dream of her intended flight. Her first waking thought was about the weather, and wrapping a cloak round her she went to the window to look at the sky. The sun shone brightly, and the sea was calm; but she was growing weatherwise, and felt almost certain the wind would blow harder towards evening. No matter, provided it did not prevent the lugger from sailing. She would not have held back for fear of a rough journey, she had no fear of anything as long as she could be with

Jesse. Even when sometimes the recollection of that terrible night when they had so nearly perished came back upon her, it was blended with the remembrance of how he had held her clasped to his heart, and had pressed kisses on her forehead and hair. She would have faced that storm again sooner than not follow him. But her fear was that the lugger might not sail, and a day be lost. It seemed to her, after she had packed up her small box and had had her solitary breakfast, that the day would never wear on; the only sign that the hours were passing were that the sky grew duller and Fanny looked more and more miserable with her continued toothache, and at last May adopted the happy idea of sending her to bed.

"Never mind dinner for me," she said, "I can find something in the pantry, and I can dine with my uncle at Enderby."

Fanny believed her, and went to her bed to try and forget her pain in sleep.

Then May watched the clock, growing more anxious every minute as she heard nothing from Jesse, and saw the clouds drifting inland. She went upstairs and put on the dress Betty

had made and the boots she so detested, and put a cloak over the gown to hide it from any chance passer-by who might be on the beach. Then she locked her discarded dress up in one of the trunks going to London, took the keys, and went down to the old landing-stage with her bundle in hand. The boat was there, but there was no one in it; and as she stood there the distant church clock struck three. May put the bundle into the boat and went back for her little bonnet-box, and, returning with it, sat down on the beach and tried to be calm.

In about fifteen minutes a short quick step sounded on the shingle between her and the road, and Betty came up.

"I was afraid I should be late," she said, stowing her *impedimenta* safely into the boat, "and I think it will come on to blow. Is not Jesse come?"

Betty was dressed exactly like May, in a brown woollen dress and gaudy shawl, but she had put white strings on her bonnet.

"Because they know I'm to be married," she said. "You are to be my sister, and I am to call you Mary; but Sam says we are not to

“speak to any of the men any more than we can help.”

May looked anxiously round for Jesse, he was coming towards them to her great relief. He had been delayed and was hurrying forward, and was much pleased to find she had already brought her small luggage down to the landing-stage.

“But we have time enough,” he admitted; “it’s only half-past three, and the boat is all ready.”

He helped them both in, unloosed the chain, and took the oars.

“Where’s the lugger?” asked May; “near the town?”

“Off the High light; but I want to go out so as we shan’t be seen, and drop down to her as it’s getting dusk. I’ll row quietly. We have plenty of time.”

They crept quietly over the water, no one speaking. May had no wish to talk to Betty, and Jesse was silent except to ask May to put on the warm shawl, and change her hat for the bonnet and veil. She did so and disposed of the hat and cloak in the box; and they were all

silent again, rowing slowly, and keeping the lugger between them and the town. It was quite dusk before Jesse turned the boat's head towards the land and rowed to the vessel. A shout told them they were seen, and a rope was thrown them as they came alongside.

"Here Sam, here she is safe and sound, with her boxes, too, which is a blessing," said Jesse, laughing, as he helped Betty up within reach of his shipmate's arm.

"Glad to have the boxes, anyhow," said Sam. "Where's her sister?"

"What! two of 'em, Sam? You can't marry but one, you know," said some one, as May was drawn up.

"Could not make her come without her sister," said Sam, with mock gravity, as he helped May on to the deck. Worse than leaving the boxes behind, that."

"Well; I'll drink your health to-morrow, and wish you joy," said Jesse, handing up the bundles from the boat.

It had been arranged that when Jesse said this, Sam was to have shouted a jolly invitation to him to come with him and see the fun; but

before he could speak to give him this excuse for coming on board, another voice called out,—

“Freeman, will you come with us? We are two short, and it’s like it will blow hard to-night.”

“Ay, I don’t mind, if you can take care of my boat,” said Jesse, and climbed on deck.

He was immediately occupied with ropes and sails, and Sam took the two girls down to a tidy cabin which belonged to the master when he was on board. At present Mr. Lockwood was absent, and had left the boat in the care of a sailor whom he had formerly employed, and now taken on again.

The wind rose, as every one had expected, before they had been an hour on board, and the lugger had a hard time of it. To the girls, shut up in the cabin, and unable to keep on their feet, as she rolled over and swung round, it seemed as if there must be serious danger. Betty was thoroughly terrified, and May had no success in comforting her, until Sam appeared at the door of their retreat.

“Well, how are you getting on, lass?” he

asked, cheerily. "Rough weather this, ain't it, for your first trip? It's lucky the wind is with us, or we should not see Filby this time to-morrow, or longer."

"Is there any danger?" asked May, trying to induce Betty to rise from the floor, where she lay overcome with fear and giddiness.

"Danger? That's a good one. No; there's no danger, except as you will both be dead, of cold if you don't take something," and Sam went away, and returned with a tin mug of brandy and water, and insisted on their both doing honour to it before he would leave them.

The gale increased, and May could no longer keep her feet; she crouched down by her companion, and wondered where Jesse was. She was growing frightened, and what courage she might have had was exhausted in comforting Betty. Then came a sudden shock of water against the side of the ship, and a creaking and groaning overhead, and voices heard shouting above it all. May sprang up and opened the door, and stood, holding by the doorpost, in fearful suspense. Presently she

heard Jesse's voice saying, "All right," and a minute after he was by her.

"Don't touch me," he said, putting her gently away. "I'm all wet. Have you had something warm to drink?"

"Yes; but never mind that. Tell me, are we in danger, Jesse?"

"Danger? No, you poor little land bird. Why, the wind is with us, and we shall be in Yarmouth Roads by daylight. You try and go to sleep."

"But that noise overheard, Jesse? Tell me the truth,—don't keep anything from me."

"It is as safe as can be, dear. There's no danger; come on deck and see for yourself. No, no, you must not," he said, stopping as he was about to help her up the ladder. "You will be wet through with the rain, and there is no fire to dry you; but you lie down and sleep, it's the best thing you can do. The noise is nothing: we wore ship, that was all. I'll go and get you something warm for supper."

He went, and brought something which she promised to eat if she could, and then he unrolled a large blanket on the floor.

"Now you lie down and sleep, May. Don't be foolish; you know what real danger is, and you were not half as frightened then as now," he said, remonstrating. "And, Betty, don't you be fancying mischief, do you hear?" And with that he went off.

The scolding had done them both good, and Betty lay down on an old sofa, and May, not less hardy, but more fastidious, made a bed of the clean blanket on the floor, and, resolving not to be frightened, at last fell fast asleep, and forgot storm and danger. She waked up at last, rather cold and stiff, and found it was daylight, and the vessel was lying still. Betty told her they had anchored in Yarmouth Roads, and Sam was ready to take them ashore, as it was no longer raining. May put on her bonnet, drew the thick brown veil over her face, and followed Betty on deck. Sam was there, sending their bundles over the side into a shore-boat. Jesse was at some distance talking to Will Cousins, the sailor who was in charge of the vessel for the trip. He sauntered up to them, however, saying,—“Shall I help you, Sam, to put your ladies ashore?”

“Ay, thank ye, for them and their traps is all together too much for one,” said Sam, at which all the men began to laugh, and May felt her cheeks glow under her veil. Sam led Betty forward. “You may take that one,” he said, laughing, to Jesse. “I don’t mind if you take charge of her altogether, but I think I’ll keep this one myself.”

“Well, ’tain’t a bad idea, Sam,” cried his friends; and Will Cousins added,—

“Jesse, take his advice; it’s time you were thinking of getting a sweetheart. You had better think of it.”

“Perhaps I will,” replied Jesse, who was helping May over the side. “Who knows what a good example mayn’t do for me?”

“Come along then with us to church,” said Sam, reminded by a nudge from Betty that he was forgetting his part in neglecting to invite Jesse. “You will hear enough to make you get married yourself, perhaps—who knows?”

“Well, I don’t mind,” said Jesse, entering into the fun. “And, Will, you had better come to Filby this afternoon, and see if I have profited by the sermon.”

“Ay, come, Will. There will be a chair at the table for you, and you ought to look after Jesse,” said Sam, as the boat pulled off amidst a general roar of laughter.

May had heard this dialogue with great disgust and vexation. She was used to rough tones and voices among the boatmen, but was new to jesting like this; and she felt humiliated by it, and shrank away from Betty, who was giggling at it immensely. She was surprised Jesse seemed not to mind it, but concluded he was determined to act his part perfectly, and she admired him for his uninterrupted good temper. That he, too, enjoyed the joke, it was beyond her power to imagine.

After rowing some half-mile, they landed at Yarmouth, and May had to follow Betty, while Sam and Jesse went to the neighbouring public-house to make an elegant toilet, and Betty led the way to her cousin's home. The cousin was a quiet respectable woman, who made them welcome to a fire and breakfast, though she was in no good temper with Betty.

“After all I have done for you, and getting you taught the dressmaking, for you to throw

yourself away on a loafing sailor, like he!" she exclaimed indignantly. "It is no use saying anything to you, as your grandfather does not mind, so I'll go to church with you; but you might have done better."

The good woman had no suspicion that her other visitor was a second bride-elect, to whom her remarks applied even more forcibly. By the time May was warm and refreshed, Jesse came in, having changed his damp clothes for a holiday suit, and looking even handsomer than usual, although a little tired with the night's work. Sam came, also dressed in a very jaunty style, and soon a hack carriage was brought to the door, and they all set off, Sam being on the seat with the driver. It was not till they got to the church that Betty told her cousin that her supposed bridesmaid was herself to be married; but the good woman had taken a fancy to Jesse, and looked more approvingly on this match than on her cousin's. Betty's aunt and grandfather, and one friend of Sam's, were at the church, but Jesse had insisted that the rest of Sam's well-wishers should be withheld from attending.

A second hack carriage had followed theirs from Yarmouth. It held Mr. Freeman, who had arrived there the previous night, and had come down to watch for their landing, and now followed them to church. He kept out of their sight, however, and was content to witness the ceremony from the gallery. He went into the vestry as they left it, and satisfied himself it was all right, and then joined them outside the church door, as if he had just arrived. They were preparing to go to the village for the wedding feast, which was arranged for them by Betty's friends; but Josiah, after a glance at May's face, touched his brother on the shoulder, and said,—

“Don't you go with them to Filby, or you will disgust her with them, and with you too. She looks frightened enough now. Go home at once; you had better.”

Jesse glanced down at May, and began to fear his brother was right: she looked both frightened and unhappy.

“Shall we go home to the cottage, dear, or with them?” he asked, in a whisper.

“Oh, home, if you will,” she answered, in a tone of great relief.

Josiah beckoned to the driver of his own hack carriage to drive up, put them both in, and followed himself.

"I'll drop you at the turn near the cottage," he said. "I am going on to Yarmouth. I am going on to Norwich and Peterborough on business. It was for business I came here."

"I thought it was to make sure we had been married," said Jesse, drily.

"Oh no, not at all," said Mr. Freeman, alarmed by this unusual sharpness in his generally unsuspicious brother. "I shan't be home for a week. Write to me at the Lion at Peterborough."

Neither Jesse nor May made any answer. Mr. Freeman wished he was out of their company; they both seemed to regard him as an enemy, and May's face said plainly she would recognize no relationship with him, although as she had shaken hands cordially with Betty's grandfather at the church door, she could do no less for Mr. Freeman. She condescended to hope he would have a pleasant journey to Peterborough, and said it with the air of a disguised princess.

"She don't forget she is Mr. Cressingham's daughter, for all she has married below her," thought Josiah. "And she'll lead Jesse a dog's life till he learns to be master. I wonder how she will carry it off with her uncle. I shall not like having to tell her about the forged bill, but I must let her know before Jesse hears of it, or there is no saying what may happen."

Mr. Freeman's cogitations were interrupted by their coming to the entrance of the lane, and Jesse stopped the carriage, and helped May out. Josiah drove on. Jesse drew her arm in his, and they turned up the lane. Neither spoke till, after a minute's walk, they came to the cottage.

"Is that it?" she asked, under her breath. "Oh, what a dear little place it is! It is like the woodcutter's cottage in a fairy tale. Oh, go to the woman and get the key."

But Mrs. Tebb appeared at the door, smiling in sympathy. "I'll come back if you want me," she said, as she passed them in the garden, and went towards her own house, and May went in.

A bright fire was blazing in the grate, and all looked the picture of cleanliness.

"Oh, it is so cheerful," she said, as she looked round. "We can make it quite pretty," she added, as she laid her bonnet on a chair. "Shut the door, Jesse, or the fire will smoke. Quick!"

But after he had closed the door, he turned and caught her in his arms, and covered her with kisses.

"I can't help it, dear; you must let me," he said, as she shyly turned her face away, and hid it on his shoulder. "I did not take a kiss in church, because I thought you minded it. Give me another now. You are not crying, dear?"

They were not tears to signify. Her eyes were beaming with happiness, as she looked up, and returned his kiss.

"Oh yes, I was very glad! Such a little, little kiss in church!" she said, smoothing back her ruffled hair, when at length he released her. "How roughly Sam did kiss Betty. I think she was quite vexed."

Poor Sam had only given his bride a hearty kiss on both cheeks to seal their plighted vows. He certainly had no thought he was rough.

Jesse saw it was a fortunate thing he had brought May home, instead of going to the feast at Filby.

"Did you choose the furniture? What a queer chair," said May, looking round; "and what an old-fashioned clock! You must make a porch over the door, and train roses over it."

"Anything you like," he answered; "but," he added as he took her hand, and drew her again near to him, "I can't think of that now. I can only think how strange it is you should be here, and I should be able to call you my wife."

"Oh, I knew I should be your wife some day," said May, very contentedly; "but I am glad Josiah made us be married now. It will be much pleasanter living here with you than with Betty and Sam. Now I am going to get you something to eat. You don't know how I can cook. Green taught me. Poor Green! I wonder what she is doing now. But this kettle is too big. I can't lift it. Why did you get it? It would make tea for a whole ship's company."

"But there is no boiler, you know," said Jesse, lifting it on to the fire.

"Oh, dear! so there is not, nor an oven. How ever shall we cook anything?"

"Mrs. Tebb will do it all," said Jesse. "I've told her she can be your servant. I'll go and call her."

"No, no, don't; not now. I like doing everything to-day. I am going to cook you those beefsteaks which I see on that dish, and here is bread for three days, and tea and sugar. Let me do without Mrs. Tebb. I like it, and there is nothing to do else. We can't go and look at the garden. Hark at the rain and the wind."

"Yes; the gale is coming on again. It will blow harder to-night," Jesse answered. "I hope Will won't stop late with them at Filby; he ought to be on board the lugger to-night."

"Oh, Jesse, I am so glad that you need never go to sea any more," said May, as she came and sat by him, and laid her cheek on his shoulder.

The wind increased as it grew dark. About six o'clock, Will Cousins stopped at the door in a rather merry condition, having come from

the wedding party. He explained that he was going back to look after the vessel entrusted to his care.

"But I thought I'd just stop and pay my compliments to you, my lad, and your missis. I did not think you would set such store by my advice when I gave it you this morning," he said, laughing. "Good-even to you, mistress; he is a good lad," he added, as he saw May busily arranging her tea-cups. "You have made a good choice, I can tell you. I have sailed with him, and I know. I wish you joy, and him too. Good-night," and Will disappeared into the darkness.

"He is a good fellow," said Jesse, as he nevertheless bolted the door, lest any other visitor should drop in. "And he knows his trade too. The lugger is safe with him."

"He was rather tipsy, was not he?" asked May. "Oh, Jesse, really you have chosen this ring very stupidly; it is too tight; I can't wear it. It quite hurts my finger. Look."

Poor girl! It was only a presage of what her marriage itself would prove to her in after-days, however happy she might be now.

CHAPTER VIII.

DROWNED OR LOST?

TEN days later, Dr. Theodore Halton was sitting in the library of his brother's house in Creswick Gardens, where he had domiciled himself while his wife and daughters were at Mentone. He was reading a report of the last meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, and his son Edward, contrary to the usual habits of young men of his age, was perusing an encyclopædia for his evening's relaxation—when Mr. John Halton came in, with an open letter in his hand, and a countenance expressive of dismay, and said,—

“I have received the most extraordinary news from Sandmouth. My niece, Margaret Cressingham, has set off alone from the town, telling the servants she was coming to see me, and she has not been heard of again.”

“Set off to come here? alone by herself? the child has met with some accident!” ex-

claimed Dr. Halton, opening his eyes in bewilderment.

Dr. Theodore Halton was not an ordinary looking man ; indeed he was striking to behold, even slightly ludicrous. He was tall, and largely made, but he stooped till he was as small as his brother ; his sight was bad, and he wore very round spectacles, and he had a habit of pushing his spectacles up to the top of his prematurely bald forehead, and forgetting they were there, and putting on a supplementary pair, so that he looked more scientific than dignified ; and irreverent people, seeing him for the first time, were apt to laugh at him as Lewis Graham had done. He opened his round eyes inside his round spectacles as his brother spoke, and listened in dismay to the letter that John read him. It was from Green, who had returned from her week's holiday, and found Fanny and old deaf Matthew contentedly believing that their young lady had gone to London. Green, recognising the impropriety of so young a girl travelling such a distance by herself, grew very uneasy when she found no letter had come from May ; and her anxiety

was not decreased, when she saw that she had left all her wardrobe behind her; and in great distress of mind she now wrote to Mr. Halton to learn news of her darling.

"I am afraid the child has met with some accident on the journey," said Dr. Halton. "If she were still in the neighbourhood of Enderby she would have communicated with the servants. Been gone since the fifth, does the woman say?"

"I suppose I ought to go to Sandmouth immediately," said John Halton. "There must be no delay. It is a long journey."

"May I go?" asked young Edward Halton, who had taken the letter, and was re-reading it carefully. "I can go to-night, and set inquiries on foot before you come down."

"That is an excellent idea, Edward," said his uncle; and Edward took down Bradshaw, and consulted him. "I shall get there by to-morrow morning at six," he said. "I shall catch the mail train to-night, and I shall go to the man of whom you rent the house. He is probably the only person with brains about the place, and then I can tell the police at Enderby to look out."

John Halton agreed that this was the right course to take, and Edward set off on his journey: the third morning after, brought a letter from him to Dr. Halton.

“BLUE LION INN, SANDMOUTH,

“*Dec. 18th.*

“MY DEAR FATHER,—I am afraid there will be very sad news to tell in a day or two. It seems almost certain the poor girl has been drowned while out in a small boat on the fifth. It is quite certain she did not come into Sandmouth to meet the coach for Enderby, as the servants say she intended to do; and it is almost as certain, that if she set out to come to the village, she would have come by the water, in a little cockleshell boat which was kept at the house, as she was lame, and could not walk more than a few yards, and the fly from the inn here was not sent for. She often came to the village in this boat, and there is too much cause for thinking she went in it that afternoon, and was on the water when a heavy gale rose; and every one here is of opinion that the boat was swamped, as it cannot be found

anywhere; and also the boatman who always took Margaret out, has not been seen since that day. I fear this conjecture is the right one. She was nearly drowned six weeks ago when out with the same man. The wind rose suddenly and they had a narrow escape then. I will write again to-morrow."

The morrow brought no letter from Edward, but the next day did.

"BLUE LION INN, SANDMOUTH,

"Dec. 20th.

"I have passed all the day writing to the towns along the coast to inquire if the missing boat or the bodies have been seen. Every one here, has an opposite conjecture as to where they are likely to be carried by the currents. But meantime, I am almost wishing to be sure that she is drowned, for one man here has whispered a dreadful surmise to me, which I hardly dare to think of. It is that she has actually been mad enough to go away in the company of this sailor. It sounds incredible, but the man who told me his suspicions has

good reasons for them. He is the gardener at the Hermitage, and he says, she was always with this man, who is a relation of Freeman's, young and good-looking, and was always rowing her up and down; and the gardener now says he has not a doubt they have gone off together; though he maintains that he never suspected anything until he heard she was gone. He and the woman Green both went off, or were sent out of the way, and only a girl left in the house; and she was in bed all day, and did not see Margaret go out on the fifth, but supposed she had gone to Enderby. The general idea is, that she started in the boat for the village, intending to go by the coach to Enderby, there to meet Uncle John, and was drowned in the gale; but the gardener has pointed out to me, that if she hoped to catch that coach, she must have left the Hermitage at an early hour in the afternoon, and the gale, he finds on careful inquiry, did not rise until six in the evening, and it is impossible, therefore, to suppose she met with any accident. Josiah Freeman is away, but I went to his wife, and told her what the gardener said. She

seemed very much shocked, but I could see she thinks it too probable. I have sworn James to keep his surmises to himself, and I am now writing to you to ask if you will not prefer to send some private detective down to find her, rather than let the regular police have anything to do with the matter. We may all have even to feel thankful for this report of her death."

After reading this letter, John Halton roused himself from his ordinary idleness, and went to secure the services of Mr. Crosskey, a secret detective of the highest ability, and sent him down to Sandmouth to communicate with Edward. But though Mr. Crosskey went to work with energy, it was not the work of a day to trace the fugitives. Every one in Sandmouth believed them drowned, and Edward was anxious not in any way to shake their belief in that idea; so it was a delicate matter to make inquiries suggestive of any other solution to the mystery; and if she were not drowned, there was no real ground for believing she was in company with Jesse. It only rested

on James the gardener's suspicions, and Green scouted the idea indignantly. "Miss May was a lady," she said, "and she was not likely to think of a common sailor like Jesse." Nobody else in Sandmouth even hinted at James' suggestion. At last Mr. Crosskey began to adopt the hypothesis that the gale had blown the boat out to sea, and began to inquire if any shipping had been off the coast,—and finally he went to Yarmouth in search of Lockwood's lugger. Edward left him at work, and returned home to report progress.

"She may be drowned, or she may have been blown out to sea and picked up by some vessel; but I see Crosskey thinks there is no doubt she has gone with this man. Josiah Freeman's wife seems to think it, though she does not actually know it. Crosskey thinks she is sincere, and her evidence shows Margaret was completely infatuated with the scoundrel; she was in his company almost every day."

"Yes; that is it. It is our fault, for leaving her there among only servants," said Dr. Halton. "We ought to have had her here with ourselves."

It may be noted, that it was owing to Dr. Halton's representations, that John Halton had proposed to fetch May up to London for a few weeks before the school term commenced.

"They say she was so pretty," said Edward. "Such bright, beautiful hair; the women cannot help crying, when they talk of her lying cold and white under the water."

"She ought to have been with us," said Dr. Halton, wondering, as he noticed the sad, almost tender, tone in which his son spoke, if this mischief might not have been averted if only Edward had been sent occasionally to look after his cousin. That they should love, and some day marry each other, had been a plan Dr. Halton had lately begun to entertain; and if his wife and daughters had been in England, he would have asked John to let him take charge of Margaret. He had once hinted the possibility of such a marriage before his son, and he was afraid now from the tone of sadness with which the young man spoke, that the hint had been understood and thought of.

"Which ever way it turns out, whether the

poor child is dead or alive, we shall never forgive ourselves," he said, despondingly.

"I don't feel it is our fault at all, Theodore," said John Halton. "I am sure I at least have done all I could for her."

Edward looked at his uncle with some surprise, studied his face a moment, and then sat down to write a letter.

At the very hour while her cousin conjured up his painful vision of her lying cold and white under the pitiless waves, May was idling in the warm light of the cottage fire, all smiles and laughter, for she sat by Jesse; her arm was round his neck, and her bright hair hung like a veil of gold over his shoulder. Her eyes shone with happiness and love as she nestled close to him, though, conscious of her privilege as a wife, she scolded him unmercifully.

"Yes, you always do; you always do everything wrong. Josiah was quite right; you are too stupid to be trusted with anything but a ship. Did not I send you to Yarmouth to change my ring because it pinched my finger red and blue, and did not you bring me back this one that

drops off every time I move my hand? I know I shall lose it. You will find it on the floor some day. I think it is a sign you want to get rid of me, isn't it?" she asked, laying her cheek against his as she spoke.

"I'm sorry it is too big. I'll change it again; but I haven't done anything else wrong, have I?" asked Jesse, drawing her on to his knee.

"Wrong? anything else? You always do everything wrong. I sent you to Yarmouth to buy me a black shawl, and you brought back a bright blue. Was that wrong or was it right, eh?"

"I did not like to buy you a black one, it would be unlucky, and your hair looks so pretty when it falls down over the blue."

May's smile showed the compliment was grateful; but she replied,—

"No; it was because you were in a hurry to get to the Hand and Sceptre with Sam, and drink grog with Will Cousins,—a great deal more than was good for you, too."

"Indeed, darling, I took very little. Did you think I had had too much?"

"I don't know. You were very noisy, and

Sam was quite wild. Betty was quite unhappy when she took him away. I suppose it was the cold air after the grog made you worse."

"It must have been, dear. I only had three glasses, indeed."

"Oh, don't look unhappy, Jesse; there was not any harm," said May, soothingly. "You were all right. You were only more good-tempered than usual," she added saucily. "Only you know it won't do for Jesse Freeman, Esquire, of Rawlstone Hall, to walk home from Yarmouth singing Rule Britannia when he has had three glasses of wine. And that reminds me of another thing you've done wrong. Did not I ask you to go to Yarmouth this morning, and get a chaise to drive me over to Rawlstone, and have not you forgotten it?"

"And so have you," said Jesse, indemnifying himself for his scolding by taking a kiss. "But I did not forget it; but there is too much slush in the lanes to go to-day."

"I want to go when we can. I want to see the place, and settle where we shall live," said May.

And Jesse asked rather anxiously, "Are you tired of living here, then?"

"Tired of living where you are? You know I can't be," she answered caressingly; "but I want to see where we can live in Rawlstone. You know we can't have the Hall till I am twenty-one. It is let to somebody; and we must have a smaller house. I think you might give Mr. White, that bailiff there who is so bad, notice to leave, and then we could live in his house. I believe it is a nice farm-house kind of place, and we might do very well there."

"Are you not going to write to your uncle, and tell him where you are, and that you are my wife?" asked Jesse.

"Oh no; not just yet. He will be so very angry, and will write such dreadful letters. I should not mind if he would only scold me. When you don't care for a person, you don't mind what he says to you; but I don't want to hear him speak ill of you."

"But you must expect that, darling; he will tell you, you have disgraced yourself by marrying a poor sailor."

"That's just why I don't want to write,

Jesse. It don't matter really what he says, as he can't take me away from you ; but I don't want to hear him speak ill of you."

" But I think, somehow, you ought to write ; for Sam has heard from Sandmouth that they are all in great trouble about you, and Green thinks you are drowned, and me too ; and your uncle or his son has come there to ask about you."

" Oh dear, Jesse ; do they think so ? We must not let them think that, though I don't think uncle would care much. But poor Green !—why does not Josiah tell them I'm safe ? "

" Perhaps he thinks you had better tell it first," said Jesse, " and perhaps he is right ; but I think your uncle should know, though I would rather——"

" Rather what, Jesse ? Tell me. I will know."

" I'd rather we had stayed here a little longer, without any of them coming to look after you,—a little longer," he said rather sadly.

She put up her hand, and smoothed away the frown from his forehead. " Uncle John won't come, Jesse ; he will find it too much trouble.

He will write tremendously long letters. We will burn them. And he will say he will never forgive us. I don't care; he can't keep Rawlstone Hall from me when I am of age, and till then we must go to Josiah, or we can live here, and I'll do needlework, and you must work for the farmers near Rawlstone. You will learn all about farming in that way. And he will soon feel ashamed of having his niece living in a little cottage, and send us word we may choose a respectable house for ourselves."

"It is not that I was thinking of," said Jesse, still refusing to laugh with her. "It is that I'm afraid that when you read his letters, and see what a shocking thing he thinks it for you to have married such a one as me, you will feel sorry a little yourself, perhaps."

"Oh, Jesse, how can you!" exclaimed May, stopping his mouth with her hand. "You must never say that again. What do I care for him, or anybody else but you? You don't think I was wrong, do you?" she added archly; and disengaging herself from

his arm, she danced away before he could answer the question. "Now I'll get ink and pens, and write to poor Green, and to uncle. Uncle first."

May found this letter no easy task. She wrote several, and tore them up in turn. At last she penned one in a great hurry, and folded it up determinately.

"Would not you like to see it? But you shall not," she said, laughing and holding it up tantalisingly before Jesse, who was watching her anxiously. "You shall not know what I have said to him about you."

"I don't want to," Jesse answered, making an ostentatious parade of filling his pipe.

"Yes, but you shall see it though," May said; "but you shall not touch it; give me both your hands."

"Are you afraid I shall snatch it and tear it?" said Jesse. "I give you my word I won't. I hope you have been civil to him."

"Very well, you can read it then. I have tried to be very civil to him, I know."

If she had, she had a singular notion of civility. The letter ran :—

Dec. 25th.

“DEAR UNCLE,—I have only just heard that you think I am drowned; so I write, that you may not be unhappy, though I am afraid you will be displeased with me, when you hear I am married to Jesse Freeman, until you know how good he is, and how I never can love him as much as he deserves. He has been my kindest friend these three years; and is so good and so noble. I am afraid you will be vexed because he is poor, and because I did not tell you; but I would have told you if I could, and you know I am rich, so his being poor will not signify. You will like him when you come to know him, I am sure. I am very sorry you should have been frightened about my being drowned. If you will forgive me, I shall be very glad. I remain, your very affectionate niece,

MARGARET FREEMAN.

“Now don’t say you don’t like the letter,

for I won't alter it," she said, as she watched his face, and saw he was pleased. "And here is my letter to Green. I'll read it."

"DEAR GREEN,—I am not drowned. I am married to Jesse, and am very happy. Tell the people I am safe; but do not tell them we are married till I write again. Good-bye."

"That will make her feel satisfied, and she can be married too, and be happy. Now, who will post these letters? Oh, Betty shall, to-morrow."

It was unfortunate that May chose Betty for a post messenger. Betty went marketing for herself and for May, and came every day to see her, and offer assistance in her housekeeping, although the next door neighbour, Mrs. Tebb, was at hand to do all that was required; but Betty liked to come, and Sam liked a chat with Jesse, and often persuaded him to come to the tavern at the cross roads, and to this May had made no manner of objection. It was only to another visit to the Hand and Sceptre, that she objected, and that only

because Jesse stayed there a long time away from her, and not from any fear of his drinking. His head was strong, and an extra glass only made him very merry, and caused her no more real uneasiness than his occasional oaths, which, however, she always made a point of blaming him for. But she was quite indifferent to his going with Sam to have a glass and a pipe at the tavern, and meanwhile consulted with Betty about her needlework, for which Josiah had provided materials so abundantly. Betty—who looked upon the cottage as her own future home, as soon as May should have removed to one somewhat more suitable—was particularly interested in some curtains on this winter morning, and going to market with her mind full of tapes, nails, and strings, forgot the letters she had promised to post; so that they did not arrive at their destination until some days later, and before that time Mr. Crosskeys had written to Mr. Halton, asking him to meet him at Yarmouth, and bring his nephew with him. Mr. Crosskeys having a certain respect for that

young man's promptitude and readiness for action when time was valuable.

"He does not say he has found her, nor whether he thinks she is alone, or with that scoundrel," observed Mr. Halton. "He evidently writes in a hurry; we must go at once. I wish the weather was milder."

"What are you to do with her when you find her?" asked Dr. Theodore.

"That depends upon where we find her," answered John Halton. "If she is openly living with this rascal as his wife, I suppose she must be married to him as quick as may be; but we will tie every farthing of her money upon her, and settle Rawlstone Hall on her first."

"Yes, of course; if she is to marry him, it is our duty to secure every penny of her money on herself," said Dr. Halton; "but I am very doubtful if we ought to let her marry him."

"Theodore! are you dreaming, or mad?" cried his brother. "Not marry him now! But she is already ruined—lost; it must be—she must marry him."

Dr. Halton took off his spectacles.

"I know the world would say so," he replied gravely; "but I think we can manage to keep it secret from the world, and I think this girl will have worse cause to rue her folly for life, if she is married to this scoundrel, than if we can hide her disgrace, and hush up all scandal. We can hide her. I go to France next week, and I will take her abroad, and leave her in some convent, where she can remain for two or three years, and the scandal never be known. There is a general belief, Edward says, that she is drowned; and this is a fortunate circumstance. We may have to keep her abroad for some years; but at all events, John, it would be madness to let this girl of seventeen bind herself to this scoundrel for the rest of her life."

"But suppose the story should ever come out," said John Halton; "think of our position."

"Yes; but I am thinking rather of hers," replied Theodore; "and I believe, sad as her whole life will be from this unhappy

madness, that she will be better off, living unknown in some quiet convent, or some English country village, than married to the designing villain who has ruined her to get possession of her money. It is her interests that must be our chief care, John; we are her guardians, and have neglected our trust. If we had looked after her this could never have happened."

"But think of your own daughters," said John Halton; "how this scandal—if it should ever come out—would injure their prospects in life. Think of Gertrude and Florence."

"I do think of them," said Theodore, much troubled. "Of course it would. My poor girls, it would be very sad for them; but that is not the question. I do not consider you have the right to sacrifice your sister's child to my daughters. And I know I would rather see my own girls lying dead at this instant, than married to such a rascal as that. Why, John, you know as well as I do, how the law allows a man to ill-use a woman if she is his wife. You must have felt, as I have, that it is only your own better feelings

that protect your own wife, it is not the law; and consider, then, if this girl will not be less miserable, hiding her shame and folly in some safe place, than if she is compelled to take this scoundrel for her master. Whatever is best for her we ought to do, regardless of the consequences to ourselves."

"I think we ought to consider ourselves before her," replied John. "She has forfeited all claim to any consideration. I should look at the matter solely as it affects us in the world."

"I hope that if we do right in this matter, we may be able to conceal our trouble from the world," replied his brother; "and for her sake—"

"I think you are mad," answered John, contemptuously. "Even for her own sake she ought to marry him, and most certainly for ours; but we can talk better of this when I have found her. And Theodore, I am not going to tell my wife about this, and I advise you not to write to Alice."

"Alice is ill, and is not fit to bear any anxiety," said Dr. Halton; "but I wonder

you should keep it from Anne. She might be able to offer us some good suggestion." But John Halton shook his head, and replied his wife should know nothing whatever of it.

John Halton hastened down to Yarmouth, accompanied by his nephew. The snow had whitened all the low hills, and the sea, whenever they caught a glimpse of it, was rough and stormy. They travelled in silence so absolute, that their one fellow-traveller—a physician going to visit a dying patient—could not help occasionally raising his eyes from his newspaper to look at his two moody companions. He could learn very little from his scrutiny. The countenance of the elder man was puckered in intense annoyance and perplexity; that of the younger wore a frown of determination amounting to sternness; and yet Edward was sad as well as angry, while John Halton felt only a keen sense of the disgrace and trouble his ward had brought upon him. He wished she had been drowned, as the people in Sandmouth said she was. At the station he saw Crosskeys waiting for him. The detective came to

the window, and invited him to follow him into a private room, of which he had already secured possession by some freemasonry[—]belonging to his order. Crosskeys soon came out, and told Edward his uncle wished to speak to him.

“The very worst has come to pass, Edward,” said Mr. Halton. “She has followed the man home to his cottage, and is still there calling herself his wife. I don’t know what to do.”

“Why, go to her at once, and tell her she must be married to him,” said Edward. “Let us go. Will he give us much trouble?”

“Oh no, it is very fortunate, he has gone away to-day. Crosskeys does not know where, but he is gone.”

“Well, then, shall I order a fly?” asked Edward; but Mr. Halton preferred to wait and dine in the refreshment room, and arrange his ideas as he did so.

“You had better sit down and eat comfortably, Edward,” he said, surveying his impatient nephew with annoyance. “This beef is not bad.”

"Thank you, I have had some soup, and I don't want anything more; shall I call for a fly?"

"Not yet; there is no hurry; sit down. I can't think what to do first."

"Eat your dinner, I think," said Edward, throwing himself into a chair by the window, and looking out at the carriages in the station yard. "We can talk as we drive there."

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURED.

MAY was all alone that evening. Jesse had very unwillingly left her that morning, on a business that could not be neglected. He had been summoned, with Sam, as witnesses to prove his friend, Will Cousins, innocent of a charge of assault and battery, laid against him in London. Jesse knew that Will could not have been the real offender, for on the very day he was alleged to have committed the offence in London, he had met him in Yarmouth, at the Hand and Sceptre,—the only day Jesse had been to the Hand and Sceptre since his marriage. Sam had been there also, and was likewise summoned to London. Jesse was very reluctant to go, but there was no help for it.

“You must tell Betty to come and stay here to-night; you must not be alone in the house, and you must call Mrs. Tebb to come and sit with you till Betty comes.”

"I'll walk with you a little way," May said; but he would not allow her to go beyond Mrs. Tebb's cottage, for fear her ankle should suffer.

"No farther. I must run the rest of the way. You will see me Friday or Saturday; and remember, you are to write to the Blue Posts, at Wapping. Good-bye, my darling;" and, after at least a dozen kisses, he ran off.

May went back resolved not to feel lonely, which resolution lasted till the afternoon; and then, when she had done all the needlework she could find to do, she went to Mrs. Tebb, junior, and offered to assist her in making a frock for her eldest child, about which piece of needlework she had seen her bungling for two days. As the frock gradually assumed fair proportions under her quick fingers, the satisfaction attending the consciousness of skill began to steal over her and restore her philosophy, and she could reflect it might be as well that Jesse should be away for a day or two, if her uncle's letter were on its way to her. It could not

fail to contain much abuse of him, and she expected to feel justly angry when she read it, and it would be better she should be alone while she replied to it. She had sense enough to see that she must try and conciliate her guardian, for that his displeasure would not be a matter of indifference to her as it was to Jesse. He looked for no remittances through Mr. Halton, but was quite prepared to go to work on a collier, and support his wife on his wages in the cottage; but she wanted to keep him near her, and to live at Rawlstone, in the bailiff's house, where she could every day see the house and ground which would one day be their own, and he could learn all about the land he would some day farm and shoot over. It seemed to her that it was, on the whole, fortunate that the Hall was let to some one, and that they must have the bailiff's house. She felt that Jesse would be happier in the little farmhouse than in the large rooms of the Hall. He would, in time, grow used to the idea of luxury, and would have become a gentleman by the time they had to live at

the Hall itself. She hoped her uncle would let them have the farmhouse, and determined to bear all his anger very meekly, so as to win him over; for though she believed he would be compelled by law to give her a maintenance out of her own future property, she had set her heart on turning the bailiff out of his house, and seeing Jesse in it. She pictured to herself a large brick-floored kitchen, and a pretty keeping-room, with roses looking in at the latticed window, and Jesse drawing up plans for the improvement of the land, when he should be in possession of it.

May's dream was very pleasant; she laid down her work, for the evening was closing in, and she would not get a candle, but sat in the flickering firelight waiting till Betty came. Suddenly she heard a noise of wheels in the lane, stopping at the gate, and then the door opened and three men came in. She sprang up in sickening terror, for her instant thought was that they had come to tell her of some accident to Jesse. Her knees trembled under her, her heart almost stopped, and she could not speak.

But as the fire flashed up, and she saw her uncle, her terror ceased. He could not have brought any bad tidings of Jesse, he had only, she supposed, chosen to answer her letter in person.

"Oh, uncle—is it you? I am so glad," she cried, in a tone of such joy that Mr. Halton stopped, completely confounded and bewildered, and stood silent, open-mouthed in amazement. May's momentary terror had left her still trembling, but she was able to think, and while her uncle stared at her in astonishment, she remembered that she had to expect a very severe outburst of anger; and for a moment she felt she was all alone, and Jesse far away. But she knew the blame had to be borne, and she braced herself up to meet it, remembering that it was only blame after all, and that when she had listened to it patiently, her guardian must enter into some arrangement about her future home. So, with a strong effort, she resolved not to make him any reply, save a duteous one, under his reproofs; and so taking his hand, she led him to the chair

by the fire, and threw another piece of wood on to make a blaze, glancing meantime at the strangers who had entered with him, and whose presence she supposed now kept him silent. One of them came forward towards the fire, while the other withdrew out of the cottage and shut the door; and as the latch dropped, Mr. Halton found his tongue.

“You are a wicked, shameless, ungrateful girl,” he exclaimed. “After all I have done for you so long,—to disgrace us all in this infamous manner; what possessed you? Where have you learned such abominable wickedness? Who put it into your head? Do not you know you have utterly disgraced your family and your friends? We shall not dare to mention your name, or let it be known we have such a miserable person as you are, related to us. You have sunk yourself in such irretrievable disgrace, that all your life long you will be unable to wipe it off, and it would be far better for you if you were lying drowned in the sea.”

May looked up astonished at her uncle's vehemence. But being quite unconscious of

the construction he had put upon her flight from Sandmouth, the real meaning of his words did not occur to her,—she only thought him very angry, and she had expected him to be so; so she waited very quietly, acting submission,—waiting till he had finished his reproof, to express her hope that he would forgive her, and ask for the bailiff's cottage. Her cheeks, therefore, did not burn with any sense of shame; she did not comprehend that she was insulted by his words. She was looking at the stranger he had brought with him,—young like Jesse, but small and slight, and fair-haired, like herself. He was attentively watching her with quick stern eyes, and she felt more afraid of him than of all her guardian could say.

Mr. Halton, meantime, continued,—

“The disgrace, the infamy, you have brought on yourself can never be wiped away. You will never be able to lift up your head again in the world. Your aunt never can receive you in her house,—our reputation would be tarnished by the suspicion of relationship with you. We all wish you were

dead, sooner than here. After all the kindness I have shown you, what could make you grow up so utterly lost to all sense of—?”

Edward looked at his cousin; her colour certainly rose, but she raised her head and looked steadily into her guardian's face, as if she were proud of herself rather than ashamed, and his quicker wit told him she was unconscious of any disgrace. Had they and Crosskeys conjectured wrongly?

He broke in across his uncle's exordium,—

“Do you mean to marry this man?” he asked in a voice hoarse and stern, with his effort to seem calm.

“Do I mean to marry him!” said May bewildered. “Have you not had my letter?” and then the blood rushed to her face as she comprehended the false position in which she appeared to them. “I am already married; how could you think I was not?” she said indignantly. “Of course I am.”

“You are married already!” cried her uncle and cousin, both at once.

“Yes; of course I am,” May answered, her

voice quivering with anger, and her cheeks now burning with shame. "I was married to him before I came here, and my husband is a good and—"

"Where is he?" asked Edward fiercely. Mr. Halton was silent, feeling that a great and terrible responsibility had been taken off him, and that his reputation was safe. Edward's thoughts went on faster.

"Why, of course he has married her. We might have guessed he would. He would not be such a fool as not to do it!" he exclaimed furiously, as he remembered that his cousin's property was now hopelessly in the power of her husband. "Where is he? Where is your husband?" he said, turning sharply upon her.

May felt too much insulted to play the part of humble penitent any longer. Edward's tone was in itself an insult, and she replied very coolly, "I don't know."

"You don't know; but you must," he cried angrily, his indignation increasing against the girl who could be such a fool as to throw herself and her money so help-

lessly into the hands of an unscrupulous fortune hunter. "Tell me, directly, where he is hiding himself."

A fear struck May, that perhaps there was some law to punish Jesse for marrying her without her guardian's consent, and she repeated rather sullenly, "I don't know."

Edward caught her arm, and shook it angrily, as he asked, "When is he coming back?"

"Perhaps she really is ignorant," said Mr. Halton. "Perhaps he has left her. You say you were married before you came here. Are you sure? Where were you married?"

"At Filby Church. Three weeks ago the day before yesterday," said May.

"Was it by banns or license?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" said Edward impatiently. "Were there any witnesses? Was there any one there?"

"Yes, oh yes. Sam and his wife, who were married at the same time; he is a sailor."

"A sailor and his wife! are those the

witnesses?" said Edward, scornfully. "Was the clergyman there?"

"I wonder very much if it is a real marriage?" said Mr. Halton. "I am afraid it is not."

"It would not be at all a bad thing if it were not," said Edward. "You could then do something about the money before they were married again."

May stood looking in wondering anger, from one to the other. They were doubting if her marriage were a legal one,—that much she understood, and a fear came over her that it might not be all right as it had been arranged in such a hurry. She said, very nervously and hurriedly,—

"But if it is not a real marriage, it can be done over again, can it not?"

Mr. Halton looked at his nephew, for this apparent admission of doubt on her side, settled the question to his mind. Edward beckoned him to come out of the house; but when they were outside the door, May stood close by it and listened. She heard Edward say,—

"At all events, sir, you had better take her to London. He will follow her quickly enough, for he will have no wish to lose her. He wants her money; and whether it is a legal marriage or not, I am certain he meant it to be so."

"Do you think so? But then if she is really married, why should I take her away?" asked Mr. Halton.

"But perhaps she is not yet, and you must take charge of her till she is," said Edward. "And there is the money to take care of."

"Well, but if it is a legal marriage, I can do nothing about the money. It is too late," said the guardian, helplessly; but his nephew replied,—

"Yes, you can. You have great powers under her father's will, and you can bring the rascal to order. At all events, you must take her home now, or away from this place."

"But I will not go," said May, opening the door. "This is my husband's own cottage, and I will stay here till he comes."

"My uncle will be very foolish if he lets you," cried Edward angrily. "All Yarmouth will be coming to stare at you. You must go with us; your husband can come after you if he likes."

"I shall not go," said May, retreating into the cottage, but Edward followed her.

"It is no use for you to say you won't go," he said in a low voice; "you must, if we choose; and you had better not make a fuss about it. I could carry you into the carriage myself, and there are two men out there. You had better come quietly."

He meant the advice kindly, but she shrank back, terrified with a sense of her helplessness before mere physical strength; while he in his extreme excitement, was quite unconscious of the brutality of his words, and turned and said to his uncle, "You could catch the six o'clock train, if you drive fast; sir. I will stay here and make inquiries. Will you go and put on your bonnet in a moment?" he added, taking her arm, and leading her to the foot of the stairs. She sprang away from him, and hurried up to her own room.

"But where can I take her to, Edward?" said Mr. Halton in much perplexity. "I know of no place in town, and I know your aunt would not let her come to our house."

Edward Halton thought, that if he were married, his wife would have to receive what guests he pleased in his house, and without complaint; but he replied quickly, "There is the empty house at Dunstable, sir. Flint is in charge of it, and will keep her safe."

"An excellent idea," said Mr. Halton; "an excellent woman, Flint, I mean. Go and tell the girl to be quick, or we shall lose the train."

May, once in her own room, had bolted the door, and sunk frightened and crying on the foot of the bed; but the sound of Edward's voice soon roused her. A desperate idea of barricading herself in till Jesse returned, seized her; but, after examining the weak lock of the door, she was forced to abandon the hope. He would not be home, either, till the day after the morrow, and moreover, she had still sense enough to remember she ought rather to soothe her

uncle, than to anger him by any resistance. It could not matter much if he did take her away with him. Jesse had told her that no power in England could take her from him, when she was his wife, and therefore her uncle must let her go back to her husband. So, although her tears fell fast at the idea of being thus dragged away from her happy cottage home, she judged it wisest to make no further opposition, and, rising from her seat on the bed, she made haste to collect a little bundle of clothes, and put on her bonnet, and the warm shawl Jesse had bought her the week before. She looked round for something of his, and catching up a silk neckerchief he had left, thrust it into her bosom, and came down the stairs, dashing the tears away as she saw Edward at the bottom of the narrow flight.

"You will let me write to him, will you not?" she asked piteously.

"Yes, yes; of course," Edward replied. "Do make haste, do. But May cried, "Oh, my ring! I have dropped it; I must go back for it; wait just one minute."

"No, you cannot,—you cannot," said Edward impatiently; "I'll take care of it. Come!"

May spied the precious ring lying on the lowest stair, and sprang back for it. Edward tried to prevent her, but she reached the stairs and caught it up. "I have it!" she cried, in childlike defiance; but he pulled her back towards the door, and whether intentionally or not on his part, the ring was struck from her hand, as he led her across the garden to the fly, where Mr. Halton was already seated. Crosskeys was on the box, and as May was put in they drove off. May turned her face away from her uncle, and no longer endeavoured to restrain her sobs.

It was more from agitation and indignation than from fear that she cried, for she expected Jesse would follow her and claim her, and that her uncle could not refuse to let her go; but it might be some days before he could follow her, and at this thought she broke down altogether; and before they arrived at the railway, she was thoroughly exhausted with crying and excitement.

But it was not in May's nature to give way to grief long in the presence of an unsympathising observer. Her intense pride had early given her the habit of concealing her emotions from any one she disliked or thought unworthy of her confidence. It was only when she knew she could safely indulge it, that her imperious temper was allowed to express itself. It was this power of self-control that made all her inferiors look upon her as of a higher caste than themselves, even when they saw she had none of the polished manners of a gentlewoman. "She is badly brought up, but she is a real lady," said Mrs. Josiah; and every one who came in contact with her echoed the same sentiment. She was a true aristocrat, in this power of self-command when she had an object; and she had now for an object, not to allow her uncle to think she was frightened, or that she was sorry for having married Jesse against his wishes. Once placed in the train, she leaned back in a corner in silence, and made no reply to his repeated question, of why she had

been so wicked and so ungrateful. She took refuge in sullenness, and would give him no information as to where Jesse might be found, for she still feared that mischief might be intended him; and Mr. Halton, tired at last of unprofitable questioning, and of rebuking where no impression seemed to be made, was silent also. It was late in the night, or rather early the next morning, before they reached Dunstable, and taking a hack-carriage, drove to the house which Mr. Halton had left in charge of an old servant. It was a small square building, standing by itself, with a hedged garden in front, and a walled one behind. Mrs. Flint, the occupant, who came to the door as soon as she could huddle on her dress, was a tall, bony, ill-tempered looking woman, from whom May shrank in fear as soon as she saw her.

Mr. Halton made his niece descend from the fly and enter the house before he answered a word to Flint's expressions of surprise at his unexpected appearance. And when the door was shut and bolted, he said first,—

“Have you a fire? I am frozen to death. I would like something warm to drink.”

“I can light one in a minute, sir. Will you go into the kitchen; it is not so cold there?” said the housekeeper; and Mr. Halton, observing that he had been travelling all day and night, followed May into the kitchen, whence a current of warmer air seemed to issue. The fire was out, but still there was a little warmth hanging about the grate. Mrs. Flint took some wood and coals, and ran upstairs to light a fire in one of the bedrooms, and then she came back, and began to fill a kettle.

“I have brought my niece, Miss Cressingham, Flint,” said Mr. Halton, following her out of the kitchen. “You must not leave her a moment unwatched, or let any one see her but yourself and your husband. She has run away from her home,—run off with a sailor.”

Mrs. Flint stood still, doubtful if she understood aright; but Mr. Halton reiterating his orders that his niece should be kept a close prisoner and not allowed to see any one, or even write or receive letters, or be even supposed to be in the house, lest the terrible story should

get talked of, she began to comprehend and respond with all the energy of offended virtue.

"I'll keep her well locked up, I warrant; and take care she sends no message out of the house, a young hussy! At her age—why she don't seem eighteen, at most."

"She was seventeen last August," said Mr. Halton;—"only seventeen."

"She had ought to be kept on bread and water, if I'd the ordering of her," said Flint vindictively, as she swept into the kitchen where May was waiting, her courage still contending with cold, hunger, and the sense of helplessness. "Come with me to your own room," said Flint sharply. "You had need to be ashamed of yourself."

The old spirit flashed up in May's eyes, and for a moment her helplessness was forgotten, as she turned to answer the insult conveyed in the tone more than by the words. She looked at the housekeeper steadily, as she measured her from head to foot, and replied quietly, but with cool dignity,—“When you have got my room ready, you can let me know.”

Mrs. Flint stood dumb for a moment, recog-

nising the tone of one used to be obeyed ; and when she replied, it was in a more civil tone, to say there was a fire upstairs ; and May, glad enough to hear it, followed her up to her bedroom. Flint hurried to and fro, attending now to Mr. Halton, and now to his niece, receiving every time that she entered his room, fresh instructions as to the strict custody of the prisoner. She was to be seen by no one, she was not to go into the garden, nor receive any letters. This last injunction, which May overheard, caused her great indignation, and some anxiety. Her courage being restored by the warm tea that Flint brought her, she rose and went to her uncle's room, and reminded him that Edward had promised her that she might write to her husband ; but Mr. Halton answered her angrily : " You shall do nothing of the kind ; if you know where he is, why don't you tell me ? I shall see him myself, and find out if you are really married, before I let you see him. Go to your own room, child ; leave me, I am worn out, travelling up and down after you. Go, and leave me. Take her, Flint."

But May did not wait for Mrs. Flint's interference, she went back to her own room and bolted herself in, her only instinct for the time being, to protect herself from the insolent questioning of the housekeeper, for she knew that the loss of her little gold ring exposed her to the harshest construction, and to the most insulting contempt. She walked up and down the room, indulging her tears for half-an-hour; but fatigue overcame her grief at last, and she lay down and fell asleep, and did not wake until long after her uncle had left the house and returned to London,—after reiterating his orders to Mrs. Flint, as to the safe keeping of her prisoner. In Mrs. Flint's mood of virtuous indignation, she promised to obey all her master's injunctions most thoroughly, and even regretted the misjudging leniency which made him decline the idea of keeping the captive on bread and water.

CHAPTER X.

CHECK BY DISCOVERY.

EDWARD HALTON, meantime, stayed that night at the cottage ; and having vainly searched every corner for any letter or envelope that might tell him where Jesse was to be found, went the next morning to Filby and found the clerk and the clergyman, and inquired if there had really been a marriage solemnised between his cousin and young Freeman. The clergyman seemed more grieved than surprised to learn the unsuitable social positions of the parties. He said he had been struck with a certain degree of refinement in the young girl, and thought at the time it was a pity she should marry a mere sailor. "Both the young men were wild reckless-looking fellows. I thought the girls both too good for them," he added ; "but I little expected this. But you may feel assured that it is a real marriage."

"Yes ; I am afraid it is," said Edward ; "and the question now is, what can we do for her ?"

The clergyman was so astonished at the way in which his assurance of the validity of the marriage was received, that he could not resume the thread of his ideas, and saw his visitor depart in utter bewilderment.

Edward immediately wrote to his uncle, "They are really married, and there is no help for her as to her money, unless you have, as I believe you will find you have, a power by her father's will to keep back every penny till she is of age, and in that case, perhaps you can induce him to make some settlement upon her, in consideration of receiving a present income. That is your only chance. I will go to the brother, Josiah Freeman, and tell him you can keep his brother out of the money for four years, and see if that will bring them to reason. He may be more able to understand matters than the rascal himself,—for the clergyman says he was a thoroughly illiterate fellow. I have written to Flint, and told her not to let Margaret have any communication with him. I will go now to Sandmouth, and write you when I have seen the brother."

While Edward was out, posting this missive,

the letter-carrier, coming to the cottage and finding the door locked, thrust a letter under the door, and there young Halton discovered it. It was addressed to Mrs. Freeman, and he unceremoniously tore it open. He was startled to see it apparently written in his uncle's handwriting, and looked twice at the signature before he could convince himself it came from Jesse Freeman. But as soon as he saw the misspelling of words and grammatical errors, which were in curious contrast to the bold gentlemanlike hand, he read the letter as if it were an invoice, noticing the warm expressions of affection in it only with a curse, as an additional insult to his own family, and looking only for some clue as to the whereabouts of the writer. This he could not find, the unbusinesslike sailor having judged such minor details as date and address superfluous, as his wife knew where to write to him. Edward could only learn that he was in some sailors' lodging-house in London, and very anxious about some messmate who was in trouble. He therefore went to Yarmouth, and set off for Enderby, pondering in his mind the possibilities

of saving his cousin in some degree from the consequences of her folly,—her marriage having now made Freeman undisputed master of all she would possess on coming of age. Fortunately, some of her property was in real estate, and Edward had some hope of saving a little of the money. He knew there was provision in her father's will, empowering her guardian to withhold the payment of income until she was of age, in the event of her marrying contrary to his wish; and he thought it probable that, when Freeman clearly understood, if he could be made to understand, that for three years and a half he could not touch a single farthing of her money, he might be induced, in consideration of a present supply, to make an equitable settlement upon her for the future. That he would have done this willingly, Edward could not know or suppose. He inferred that if he had not been a villain, he would not have lured the ignorant girl into marrying him; but still it was possible, that even a villain, on finding that the object of his villainy was frustrated for nearly four years, would consent to forego some of his profits in order to enjoy at once some of

the fruits of his scheme. It was this hope that made Edward go to Sandmouth to find Josiah, on whose clearer head he relied to make the blundering sailor really aware of the extent to which he had missed his aim, and convince him he was still a poor man,—this being the first step to bringing him to a compromise of his future rights.

It is but fair to Edward, to remember, parenthetically, that for some months past he had been learning, at his father's suggestion, to think of his cousin as possibly a future wife for himself, which circumstance did not cause him to regard Freeman less in the light of a robber, and he deserved credit for the disinterested zeal with which he was now trying to secure her from some of the consequences of her rashness.

On reaching Enderby, Edward found it was market-day, and thinking that Josiah might be then in the town, buying corn or other commodities, he went to a banker who was his uncle's correspondent, and made inquiries as to where he might be likely to find Mr. Freeman. In the course of conversation he was surprised

to hear that Mr. Freeman had lately paid a debt to his corn-factor with a bill on his uncle's house. Edward was surprised,—even startled,—for he knew well that John Halton had refused to lend Josiah any money, and scarcely disguising his surprise, he asked the amount and date of the bill. It was immediately shown to him, having been brought to the bank to be discounted, and Edward, remembering the letter he had opened that morning, and the wonderful resemblance between Jesse Freeman's handwriting and his uncle's, suspected mischief immediately. It was for one hundred and sixty pounds, the sum which Josiah had written to beg Mr. Halton to lend him, calling it the rent of the Hermitage for two years, to be paid in advance. Mr. Halton had been so enraged at his impudence, that he had told his nephew nothing should induce him to lend the man a penny, and yet within three weeks of his saying this, Josiah presented this bill. It was simply incredible. The bill was a forgery,—and a forgery by Jesse Freeman. Here was villainy beyond what they had imagined; the man was no mere reckless

sailor, but an accomplished sharper. Poor Margaret!

Edward was quick enough to see that it would be the height of folly to fix hastily a charge of forgery on a man who was now connected with themselves, and he must proceed very cautiously. He excused his show of astonishment when he first heard of the bill, by saying again that his uncle had been unwilling to help Mr. Freeman; and then went back to the inn, where he had ordered dinner, and sat down to think.

After an hour's reflection, it seemed to young Halton, that to convict his cousin's husband of forgery, would only make bad matters worse; and he feared it would be as much the interest of the whole Halton family, as it was Freeman's, that the crime should go unpunished, and be kept a secret among themselves. This had been precisely Josiah's calculation, that "if the worst came to the worst, they would not choose to hurt Jesse; while he himself could not be reached except through convicting his brother." In which calculation, Josiah had wilfully overlooked the fact that the forgery might have

been discovered by some clerk of Mr. Halton, instead of by one of the family, and the matter made public before the head of the house knew of it, in which case very unpleasant loss of character would have been the result, although even then it was most improbable any legal proceedings would have been taken against his brother.

Horried as he was in discovering Freeman to be such a villain, Edward was not long in seeing how effectually the commission of this crime placed him in his uncle's hands, as regarded the surrender of his young wife's money. Mr. Halton could now insist on his settling the whole upon her, as the only condition of pardon. Edward wrote almost triumphantly to his uncle :—

“ He is a villain,—a rascal,—an unmitigated scoundrel, but he has done the very thing we might almost have prayed that he should do. The game is in our hands now. You can strip him, I think, of every penny ; and then he will be too glad to be pensioned off away from her in the colonies.” Having written thus, Edward went to Sandmouth to look for Josiah ;

he heard he was at Enderby market, and would soon be home.

Josiah Freeman was in Enderby, and he heard that young Halton had been at the bank; and, conscience adding wings to his imagination, he instantly guessed he had discovered the forgery. There was no time for hesitation. The discovery had been made many weeks too soon; he had meant that the bill should have been safe at Enderby until Margaret should have confessed her marriage, and been pardoned by her guardian, and then he would have told her the secret of the forgery, and let her confess it to her uncle, who would then have no choice but to forgive the crime, and repay himself from his niece's money. But now all had gone wrong; the curtain had risen on the second act of the drama before the first was played out, and Josiah saw serious work before him. He rushed to the railway, and took the up train, and when he was safely seated in it, wondered where he should go, and what ought to be done first. He was not sure whether he ought not to go and put his brother in safety before he went to tell Margaret of his danger, and take

her to her uncle to implore his forgiveness for her bridegroom. He did not know for certain if Jesse were still in London, and half doubted if he should not find him returned to Yarmouth. But the train was going direct to London, and he decided to go on there, and look for Jesse, for, knowing the straightforward bluntness and impetuosity of his brother, he thought it would be wisest to have him safe out of all possible danger of an interview with Mr. Halton, lest he might anger him beyond forbearance, or, more likely still, in his blundering innocence tell the whole story of his signing the papers, before witnesses whom it might be difficult to silence afterwards if Mr. Halton tried to do it. Josiah was not too sure where he should find Jesse, if he were in London; but he knew he had gone to bear witness for his friend Will, at the Guildhall, and there he judged he should hear news of him. It gave him a very disagreeable sensation to go near a police court under present circumstances,—but it had to be done; and there he learned that Jesse and Sam having proved that Will Cousins had been with them at Yarmouth

on the day when the offence was alleged to have been committed, he had been acquitted and set free, and that Jesse and Sam had gone off to the Blue Posts at Wapping. There Josiah followed, and found them; he had no need to ask if they were there, for a triumphant jollification was going on inside. Jesse, who, to do him justice, was almost sober, was sitting at the head of the table, supported by Sam, while his friends were drinking his health.

“Hurrah! for you, Jesse; and hurrah! for you, Sam; and may you never want a friend to stand by you at the pinch. Shake hands.” There was a general shaking of hands, and then more refreshments and more pipes were brought in, and those who had not been at the trial asked many questions concerning it.

“And so Will could not come,—gone home to his wife; aye, there are some others among us who could give the same excuse if they was minded to,” said an older man, winking knowingly at the company. Jesse and Sam reddened laughed, and tried to cover their confusion by drinking the landlord’s health; but they were not allowed to escape so easily.

"I say, Freeman, don't you want to get afloat again? Are not you tired of being on land? We want another hand in the *Martha*, she sails for Ostend to-morrow; you come with us."

"Ay, go with him, Jesse," said the old mate. "Such active lads as you are always pining after the salt water. You go aboard the *Martha*, and you'll feel quite happy and cheerful like."

It was in the midst of the laugh which followed this sally that Josiah came in. Jesse started up in sudden alarm. "Anything wrong, Josh? In God's name, where is she?"

"Oh, it's nothing; she's all right, if it's your wife you mean," said Josiah. "She is all right; but I want to speak to you about business. Can you come out with me?"

"Say what you've got to say, here," said Jesse in a surly tone, for he was ashamed of his momentary fright. "They are my mess-mates, all these here."

"I can't tell you, it's business," said Josiah, looking round superciliously at the rough assembly. "Can't we have a private room? it's business of importance."

"Say it out here, and be d——d to you," growled his brother. "I'm not going to talk about business to-night. You can keep it till to-morrow if you like."

Josiah saw it would be in vain to urge his request for a private conference, and seeing that nothing but a strong statement would attract Jesse's attention, said aloud; "Mr. Halton is going to be revenged upon you, and send you to gaol."

The word "gaol" was intelligible to all the party, they were all sober in a moment. "What for?—what has Freeman done?"

"Enough for him to be put in gaol for, if Mr. Halton can catch hold of him," said Josiah, who objected to telling Jesse the real state of affairs before so many confidential friends.

"Gaol!—what, for marrying his niece!" cried Sam. "He can't though, it isn't law, I know that."

"Ay, but I think it may be, though, if he is a magistrate," said another. "Did you not say she was a young lass as could have money? I think, Freeman, lad, you had best give him the slip, and be hid for a day or two. Come with us to Ostend."

"Yes, do, Jesse, do," said Josiah, "or you'll be in gaol to-morrow, and it will frighten your wife to death. Go with them for a day or two, and we will make it all square with Mr. Halton."

"Ay, do lad ; do come," cried the mate ; and Jesse himself was somewhat staggered. "But I can't go without going home to Yarmouth," he said, hesitating.

"I'll go and tell her about it," cried Sam, "if you go and get safe. I'll go to her, me^d and Betty, and we'll comfort her, and stay with her. You go."

"Yes, go, Jesse ; keep away for a week," said Josiah. And as Jesse was in the habit of obeying Josiah's directions, and his shipmates were all of the same mind, he yielded, and said he would go.

"One of you lads go with him on board directly," cried Josiah ; "I'll see to the reckoning."

"No ; Sam will see to it," said Jesse, emptying his pockets on the table before Sam, and catching up his hat, he went ; but at the bottom of the stairs he called Sam, and 'as they

hurried along the street, gave him his messages for May.

“Tell her I did not know what best to do, and so I have gone, but I’ll be back in three days ; tell her to write a letter to me. Where shall she send it to ? oh, tell her to send it here, to the Blue Posts. I’ll be back in three days. You’ll go and tell her yourself, Sam ? ”

“Yes, yes ; you may be sure I shall, and Betty will come with me.”

“Don’t leave it to Josh to do,—go yourself, and take Betty to stay with her ; and stay there yourself, Sam, too, the cottage is too lonesome ; and mind——”

“Jesse, man, the boat is ready,” broke in the stentorian voice of the old mate ; and Jesse was hurried into the boat, and pulled off into the river to the *Martha*, which was lying in the stream. Josiah went back to the public house, paid the reckoning, and hastened to Yarmouth to find Margaret. He found there only Edward Halton.

Edward had waited at Enderby for his uncle’s letter of instructions, or his arrival in person. He hoped Mr. Halton would come

himself, as time was lost in letter-writing; but Mr. Halton, having already made a great many journeys in his pursuit of his niece, was slow to move again, and wrote to his nephew, telling him to see Josiah Freeman, and threaten him and Jesse with the utmost penalty of the law, and when he had thoroughly terrified him, to hold out the promise of pardon,—only on condition of Jesse's making a full surrender of all his wife's property, as far as the law would allow, by settling it on her for her own private use. The deeds were to be drawn up immediately, and be signed before Jesse should attempt, or be allowed, an interview with his wife again. Mr. Halton added, as a suggestion, that if Josiah were not to be found at Sandmouth, it might be as well to look for him at Filby, as he would go there to find his brother and Margaret. Edward, following this suggestion, journeyed to Yarmouth, prepared to call the police to help him to discover Josiah; but by accident he met him at the railway station, as he was returning from Filby, astonished and dismayed to find Margaret gone and the cottage shut up.

Edward followed out his uncle's instructions to the letter, threatening Josiah with the extremest rigour of the law ; but he saw that that clever conspirator was not frightened, and clearly understood he would not be punished. Josiah was a keen scrutiniser of motives, and close calculator of chances. He knew the Haltons were as much interested as himself in hushing the matter up, and he felt sure that, as young Halton had come to find him without a magistrate's warrant, the whole thing was yet a secret among themselves, and there would be a compromise. He pretended to be very frightened, but Edward saw he was upheld all the time by the certainty that Mr. Halton would forgive the crime sooner than make his niece's husband a felon. And when Josiah whined, and equivocated, and denied his crime, and accused Jesse, delicately pointing out that it would be impossible to convict himself without convicting Jesse first, and then implored forgiveness for the sake of his own poor wife and children, Edward grew disgusted and tired, and said, more shortly than his uncle would have deemed judicious,—

"Come, Mr. Freeman, enough of that; we know what the credit of our family demands. We have considered, and we know exactly how much we are willing to sacrifice for our own honour. We know we cannot, for our own sakes, punish your brother and you as you deserve, but we have the power over you, and we mean to use it as we can for my cousin's benefit."

Edward spoke decisively; Josiah listened attentively. He knew it was to come to this,—that conditions were to be offered, and he only wanted to know what.

"Mr. Halton says your brother must make a settlement of his wife's whole fortune on herself, for her sole and separate use,—he and I being her trustees," Edward said slowly. "On this understanding only, he will stand between the law and you. Now choose."

Josiah looked very crestfallen; the conditions were worse than he had expected.

"Does Mr. Halton intend to throw his niece's husband entirely destitute on the world?" he asked.

"Yes; unless he prefers being provided for

in a convict ship," said Edward, drily. "He has a trade, I suppose. Perhaps, when the settlement is duly effected, his wife may allow him something, on condition of his keeping away from her and going to America; but I have nothing to do with that now. You know the terms,—make your decision."

"My brother is not here," said Josiah, hesitatingly; "and I cannot promise for him; nor do I know where he is."

"Not know where he is!" said Edward, incredulously. "You had better find him directly, then; this deed must be signed without delay. If you don't find him to-morrow, I shall tell the police to find him."

"I will find him the day after to-morrow," said Josiah, now really alarmed.

"I shall set a policeman to watch you, Mr. Freeman, till you find him and bring him to our lawyers in London; and if I have any occasion to think you are trying to escape us, we shall know how to prevent it. I advise you to be diligent."

Edward then dismissed Josiah, after telling the detective sent down by Mr. Crosskeys as

his substitute, not to lose sight of him, and returned to London to tell his father and uncle they might expect to see Jesse Freeman come in two days, and that he would be ready to satisfy their utmost demands in the matter of the settlement.

"All right," said Mr. Halton. "The man feels he is in our power; and after he has made everything over to her, they must be married again, Theodore, since you think there is a doubt about the present marriage."

"Does my father think there is a doubt on that point?" asked Edward.

"Yes; and so do I, and so does Quillett, to whom we have already spoken," said Mr. Halton. "There were great irregularities in putting up the banns, and it may be invalid. I think that after the money is settled on her safely, they shall be married again."

"John, I thought I had explained myself better," said Dr. Theodore. "I am going to dispute the validity of the marriage; if I can save the girl from such a scoundrel, I will do so,—it is my duty. A forger, an unconvicted felon, shall not have the power to make the girl a victim for life."

“But as she has already gone so far as to marry him—”

“I shall dispute the marriage.”

“And what will become of her reputation while you are disputing it? If there had been no marriage at all, it might have been a question, as you said, whether it would not have been better to have hushed the story up, and taken her abroad; but now he will claim her as his wife, and make it all public.”

“No, indeed, he won’t; he is completely in our power,” said Dr. Theodore. “I shall tell him it is no marriage, and that if he attempts to publish it, we shall prosecute him for this forgery. He will be silent for his own sake, and I shall take her abroad next week. I know a convent where they will be kind to her, and I shall tell Quillett to see about the invalidity of the marriage.”

Mr. Halton replied, and an earnest altercation ensued, to which Edward listened in surprise and dismay; for he saw that his father’s unwillingness to acknowledge his cousin’s marriage would end in no provision being made for securing her money from Freeman. John

Halton saw this also, and grew thoroughly incensed at his brother's opposition.

"Look here, Theodore," he exclaimed at last, "I won't stand such infernal nonsense! They shall be married. He shall draw up the settlement to-morrow, or I will see him transported!"

"And listen to me, John," said Theodore, in a tone of quiet decision. "I can make that forgery public to-morrow, and have him arrested; and I shall do so, unless—this is my alternative—he goes to America directly. I won't let him remain in England to tell how he has deceived the girl, or to have a parcel of lawyers quarrelling over a settlement that is of no consequence, for the marriage is no real one. I shall prosecute him, or see him off to America. Now you have my determination."

"Good God! what are we to do, Edward?" exclaimed Mr. Halton, as his brother left the room. "He has stopped Quillett, who was preparing the deed of settlement, because he says the marriage is void; and he says that he shall tell Freeman so. Why, then, if Free-

man has any sense at all, he will publish the fact that he has married her, far and wide, to prevent us thinking of prosecuting him. You, Edward,—you have some sense,—go after your father, and see if you can bring him to reason.”

“No, sir; I cannot interfere between you and my father in this matter,” said young Halton, reddening. “You must speak to him yourself; it is your business, not mine.”

Mr. Halton could not deny this, and went to his brother; but he was not more successful than before in argument, and lost his temper and patience.

“Your father is a maundering fool!” he exclaimed to his nephew. “He has no right to interfere at all in this matter,—he is not the girl’s guardian; and the worst of it is, that the moment he proceeds to make this forgery public, the rascals will proclaim the marriage to save themselves from him. I don’t see which way to turn.”

“Well, sir, why do you wait for either them or my father to make anything public?” said Edward, quickly. “Why don’t you send Josiah

Freeman to fetch his brother at once, and have the money settled on Margaret before my father makes up his mind what to do, or knows what you are doing? Then, when the story comes out, even if my father proves it is not a real marriage, it will look at least as if they had believed it to be one, and there will be less disgrace attached to it perhaps."

"That is an admirable idea, Edward. I will act without your father. I have no need to consult him in the matter,—he is not her guardian. Go and find Josiah Freeman at once—at once."

Edward lost no time. He found Josiah, and told him that if Jesse were not forthcoming to sign the deed of settlement (which was to divest him as much as possible of his rights over his wife's money,) within the next four-and-twenty hours, John Halton was going to indict him for the forgery. Josiah, who had before taken Edward's threats for threats only, was now alarmed and completely deceived. He gave himself up for lost, and submitted to his fate, promised to find Jesse, and went to look for him under the escort of the detec-

tive, who had orders never to lose sight of him.

But it was the triumph of Mr. Freeman's inventive genius, that he achieved a crowning victory in the very moment of utter defeat. In that very moment, when all seemed hopelessly lost, he recognised that flight and apparent submission would win the day. He was certain that his brother's marriage would prove a real one in spite of the irregularities that might have subjected them both to penalties, but did not invalidate it. He had consulted a lawyer, and felt secure on that ground ; and if he could only get Jesse and himself safe out of England for a while, and persuade Mr. Halton to give up the prosecution, his success would be perfect. He remembered what Edward did not, that the forged bill would either have to be protested, or retired by Mr. Halton within six months ; and he saw that if he could induce Mr. Halton to forgive Jesse sufficiently to pass the forgery by, and retire the bill, there would be no real evidence against him a year later. He went to his wife, who had come with him to London, and sent her to the Blue

Posts at Wapping to meet Jesse, who would return from Ostend that night; and he sent her with the message to Jesse, that he was to be arrested for forgery; and that Margaret, whose name he knew would be omnipotent with him, desired him to go on board a vessel sailing for America. The detective, who was in constant attendance on Mr. Freeman, had received no orders to watch his wife, and Mrs. Freeman carried the message to Jesse while the detective accompanied Josiah back to Edward; and then Mr. Freeman made a mock confession that his brother was concealed at Yarmouth, and offered to go in search of him. Edward would not allow this, but thinking that Josiah himself required no further watching, sent the policeman to Yarmouth to find Jesse; and, as a consequence, Mr. Freeman made good his escape, and joined his brother in the river, just before the vessel weighed anchor.

Then there was a terrible hour to pass with Jesse, when it was shown him that he had been made a criminal, and must seek safety in flight. At first he was madly intent on

going back to vindicate himself; but Josiah represented to him forcibly the misery and humiliation which such a course must bring on Margaret.

“They say she is not really married to you, and she will be disgraced before all the world. You can’t prove you are innocent; and she will see you in prison, and cannot help you, and all the newspapers will be talking of her. How do you think she will bear it?”

“And now, on the other hand,” continued Mr. Freeman, when Jesse, heartbroken by the sense of disgrace, had ceased to upbraid him; “you know, and I know, the marriage is a good one; and they can’t prove it is not. If you will write a letter and put Mr. Halton into a good humour, telling him you won’t come back, he will take that bill and retire it—I forgot, you can’t understand; I mean, he will say it is his own writing, and pay the money, and hush it all up; and then he can’t ever bring it up against you again. So in six months’ time, you can come back to England and claim your wife; they will have found out that the marriage is good by then I shall

be the worst off ; for, by going away now, I shall lose all my goods, and be, I daresay, ruined."

"Well, you deserve to be," said Jesse, bitterly. "And what will she say, when she finds I am gone? And she thought I was to protect her from her uncle."

"Well, you can't, as it happens, and they won't hurt her ; she is all right ; she wanted to know you were safe on board this ship. You can write and tell her ; I'll manage to send a letter ashore somehow."

Jesse was too thoroughly crushed to make any further opposition. He sat down to write to May. Josiah then suggested that he should send a letter to soothe Mr. Halton's feelings.

"You write to him that you won't come back and claim her for your wife, unless he wishes, and then he will be satisfied."

"What ! — eh ! — what !" thundered Jesse, springing up and dashing down the paper. "Give her up? In God's name!—give her up? Never!—if he sends me to the hulks for twenty years."

"You fool ! you would not be bound by such a promise ; it would not prevent your coming

back directly he retires that bill,—you can come back in six months. A man can't make a promise not to claim his wife,—it is not binding."

"And what would she think if she heard it?" asked Jesse furiously. "You are the devil himself, I think."

"Write to her, and tell her you won't come back unless she likes," said Josiah, "for fear you should disgrace her. That won't frighten her, because she will like you to come, and will tell you so; but you must see that unless Mr. Halton drops the prosecution against you, you would only disgrace her by coming back; and such disgrace it would be! Cannot you see?"

After some more arguments, Josiah carried his point, and Jesse wrote the letters. They were sent on shore by the pilot; and Mr. Freeman wrote also to his wife, giving her instructions how to conduct his affairs during his absence. He had very little hope that anything would be saved from the general wreck, if he were not there himself; but he gave her the best advice he could, superintended his brother's letter to Mr. Halton, and even insisted on seeing the one to Mar-

garet. Jesse made no resistance, secretly resolving to write another ; and Josiah saw that all would go well.

Mr. Halton and Edward were at first confounded at finding the criminals beyond their reach ; but, after a while, Mr. Halton thought that while it was uncertain that the marriage was legal, their flight very much simplified matters.

“ We could not have prosecuted them, and the marriage would have been known, and we should have been disgraced,” said John Halton ; “ now we have time to breathe and think. And Margaret, is she to go with your father to France, till we find out if the marriage is legal ? ”

“ No ; I have persuaded him to leave her at Dunstable ; she is safe there, and is better off than she would be in a convent, if he took her to one.”

“ Yes ; and the chances would be ten to one he would take her out of it, or she would escape,” said Mr. Halton. “ It is much better I should keep her under my own eye till we know whether the marriage will hold good or not.”

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